















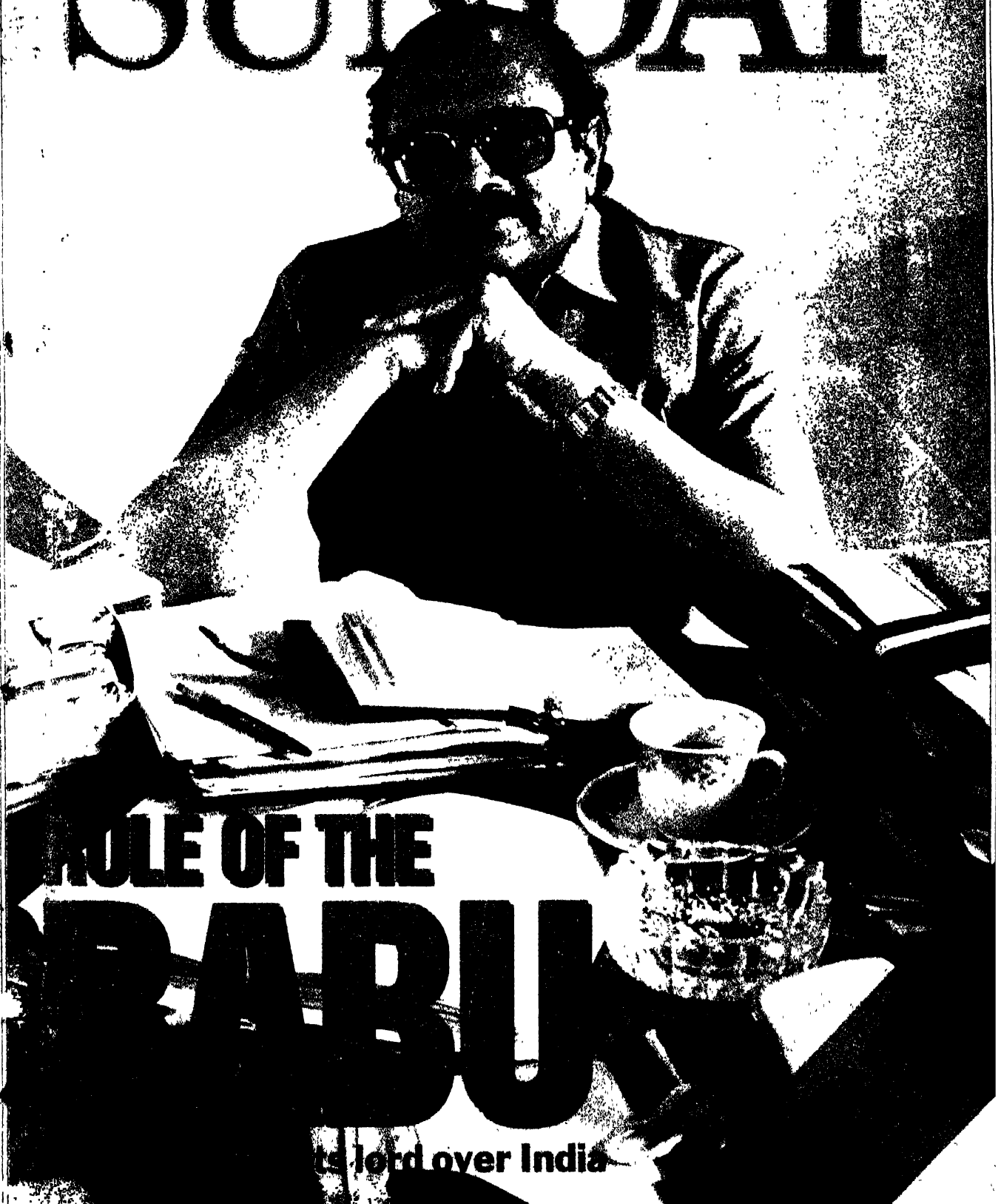






**DEVI LAL'S LETTER BOMB**

# SUNDAY



## ROLE OF THE RABU

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**Cover transparency:**  
Nitin Rai

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## The Raja's durbar

**T**he cover story was informative and interesting (*All the Prime Minister's men*, 8-14 April). It showed how the ring of yes-men around the Prime Minister enjoy power only as long as their patron does. Rajiv Gandhi's men were no less efficient (or inefficient) and dedicated than their counterparts in the new government. They

new PM's *darbar*. Before the election V.P. Singh may have claimed that he would not allow himself to be misled by yes-men the way Rajiv did. Now, however, it appears that he is as dependent on his courtiers as the former PM was dependent on his. Under the circumstances it seems that all that matters in the world of high power in Delhi is not efficiency but orated favouritism and all that works is blatant *chamchagiri*.

Aloke Biswas, Amethi (Uttar Pradesh)

## The dark Valley

**A**s the Kashmir problem intensifies the leaders do little to bring an end to the issue that has claimed countless lives in the past few years (*Vale of discontent*, 1-7 April). Increasing violence in the state



An anti-India demonstration in Srinagar: the crisis deepens

attitude of the community towards the Muslims in the country. As things stand now the situation is rapidly deteriorating with no hope of a solution in sight. The militants should realise that Pakistan will never accede to their demand for a separate state. It is only aiding the terrorists in order to annexe Kashmir.

Samir Marx Mahajan, New Delhi

writing. The columnist must be laughing at the manner in which he has provoked his readers with enviable success. It reminds one of the famous saying by Margot Asquith who said: 'Praised or abused, be discussed.' Mani Shankar Aiyar is certainly being discussed and more widely than many professional journalists of long standing.

There is no point in asking whether Aiyar is a journalist, and if so of what



## V.P. Singh: crucial test

have been axed not because of their inefficiency but because they are no longer in favour with the present government. The men V.P. Singh has chosen are the ones who will hog the political limelight in the years to come.

B.N. Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ The story provided an interesting insight into the

makes us wonder if there is any possibility of peace ever returning to the Valley. It is time we, as Indians, came forward to bury our mutual differences and wipe out terrorism from India.

Chizokho Vero Phek, Phek (Nagaland)

■ The treatment meted out to Hindus in Kashmir will adversely affect the

## Having the last laugh

**A**ccording to Mani Shankar Aiyar, 'Mrs Grundy' is a character from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, (*The Italian connection*, 25-31 March) but the character of Mrs Grundy, the symbol of rigid conventional propriety was introduced by Thomas Morton in *Speed The Plough* and not by Dickens (according to page 556 of *Chambers Twentieth Dictionary* and pages 421 and 673 of the *Oxford Companion To English Literature*).

Can one hope that the columnist's knowledge of English will be more exact than his knowledge of English literature?

P.B. Venkat, Madras (Tamil Nadu)

■ I am intrigued to find a number of readers shocked by Mani Shankar Aiyar's



## Aiyar: check facts

kind. Neither professional politicians nor professional journalists can claim a monopoly to the discussion of problems of public interest in the press or on the platform.

There is no point either in finding fault with the columnist for being partisan or propagandist. He is admittedly both and for good reasons too. He is definitely holding a brief for a party (not a negligible one by any means) and



arguing for it eloquently and briefly

After all, was it not the great G. B. Shaw who said that all literature is propaganda of one kind or the other?

**D. Anjaneyulu, Madras (Tamil Nadu)**

## A sensible decision

**T**he IPKF pull-out is an example of honest politics—similar to the withdrawal of Russian soldiers from Afghanistan (*Homeward bound*, 1–7 April). It was a mistake on the part of the ex-PM and his Congress (I) government to send the troops to Sri Lanka since the IPKF could neither disarm the LTTE nor stop the killings. The pull-out is the most sensible decision taken ever since India got involved in this dreadful misadventure.

**Birendra Seth Upadhyay, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)**

## Bleak scenario

**T**axing the middle-class has become an annual ritual for any finance minister (*Squeezing the middle-class*, 1–7 April) be it socialist Madhu Dandavate or his counterpart in the Congress. The result is that the middle-class no longer expects anything.

The new government inherited an economy with a deficit of over Rs 11,000 crores. The Prime Minister in his first address to the nation over Doordarshan said that the coffers of the Union government were empty. Thus, it was only expected that there would be a heavy dose of taxes in the budget. But the surprising thing is that in spite of such a heavy burden of duties, the deficit still stands at a whopping Rs 7,000 crores. And considering that the budget will push up inflation, the

economic scenario of the country is indeed bleak.

**N.D. Roy Chowdhury, Kharagpur (West Bengal)**

■ At a time when the common man is finding it difficult to make both ends meet, the Union budget has come as a cruel joke. True, the finance minister has not imposed additional duties on many essential commodities but the increase in prices of petroleum products will make life more costly to lead, particularly for the middle class.

**Amit Lolwal, Baroda (Gujarat)**

■ The maiden budget of the NF government does not reflect the promises it had made during the Lok Sabha elections. The people had expected that



**Dandavate: criticised**

V. P. Singh would establish a socialist pattern or society but going by what it has done so far, it is nothing but old wine in a new bottle. The additional taxes that have been imposed on a wide-ranging goods will only add to the hardships of the common man.

**Shashank Shekhar, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)**

## Sun and sand

**T**he feature on the Andaman and Nicobar islands was impressive (*Islands in the sun*, 8–14 April). The colour photographs that accompanied the piece were breathtakingly beautiful and the



**Fishermen at Port Blair: the native colour remains**

text informative. Such pieces not only boost tourism (the pictures of the beach are enough to tempt one to start planning a visit to the islands) but they also provide valuable insight into the 'look and feel' of the place.

**B. N. Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

■ The write-up on the islands in the sun not only focused attention on the beautiful beaches and natural scenery of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, but also captured the life of the local population which, thankfully, has not lost its native colour.

**Wasbir Alam, Ahmedabad (Gujarat)**

## The PM's travails

**V**. P. Singh must wake up to the harsh realities of life (*Can the honey moon last?*, 25–31 March). Politics is an art and over the years, it has proved to be a difficult one which has few masters and many students. However, it is unfair to blame V. P. Singh for the slips committed by the National Front (NF) government. With each of the major coalition parties desperately trying to gain mileage (ego problems within each party aside), the electorate's disappointment with the NF government is hardly surprising.

**Sashi Nair, Madras (Tamil Nadu)**

## Paying a price

**K**aran Singh's interview was interesting (*An ambassador's tale*, 1–7 April). Many of us in this country have a high regard for him and wish he had continued as an ambassador. Karan Singh feels relieved that he was not involved in the St. Kitts scandal, but does not seem



**Karan Singh: discreet silence**

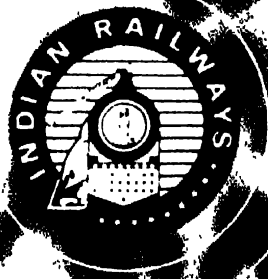
to realise that he was in the thick of it by his inaction. By keeping quiet, he unwittingly became party to the scandal and paid the price.

**K. S. G. Murti, Madras (Tamil Nadu)**

*The photographs which appeared with the article Under-cut, (15–21 April) captioned Gurbux Singh and Balbir Singh are not those of the persons mentioned in the story. The error is regretted.*  
—Editor.



# REACHING GOALS



# PEL

**G**uarding the goal! Dribbling, passing, converting opportunities and sounding the board. The pride of the country.  
*Eric Penninger, Kishan Lal, Balkishan Singh, Mohinder Lal, Joginder Singh, J. Antic, Rajinder Singh, Harbinder Singh, Prithpal Singh, Mukhbain Singh, Varinder Singh, V.J. Phillips, Surjit Singh, Ajit Singh, V. Bhaskaran, Michael Kindo, Mohd. Shahid, Pargat Singh and several others.*  
Each one of these hockey heroes wore the Railway colours with pride and served the nation with distinction.

To evoke nostalgic memories, reflect the indomitable will to succeed and inspire us to reach new pinnacles of glory. In the sports arena the Indian Railways have an enviable record — winning over twenty national sports championships each year.

Even the 1972 Olympic awardee represents the Railways! This symbolises the fortitude, physical fitness and team spirit among the 16 lakh strong family of Indian Railways.

Yes, the Indian Railways have an unbeaten track record as the largest in Asia, carrying 1.1 million passengers and nearly 10 lakh tonnes of freight over a distance four times to the moon each day. Higher productivity and greater public service are only a few of the milestones the Indian Railways are reaching.

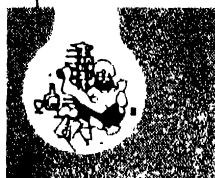
The endeavour to excel continues unabated as the Indian Railways echo the sports persons dream of 'Swifter! Higher! Stronger!!!'

## INDIAN RAILWAYS CHAMPIONS OF THE TRACK





# Naguib Mahfouz



Not many people outside the Arab world could have heard the name of Naguib Mahfouz when he was awarded the Nobel

Prize for literature in 1988. I certainly had not. And wondered if he was yet another second-rater like Pearl Buck, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Golding who had been honoured with this award for geographical or other considerations rather than excellence in writing. I did my best to lay my hands on a translation of something by Mahfouz. Till last month no bookstore owner in Delhi seemed to have heard of him. It was much the same in London. I told bookshop attendants about his Nobel Prize, the excellent reviews he had received in British papers a few days ago and the name of the publishers, Doubleday. I was met with a blank stare. Even at Foyles, which boasts of being the biggest bookstore in England, they expressed total ignorance. It was only in Glasgow that a friend to whom I had spoken of the indifference of bookstore attendants was able to procure three novels of Mahfouz translated into English by Ramses Awad and edited by Rossiter Smith. I promised to myself that I would read them on my homeward journey from London to Delhi.

I had made a mess of my travel arrangements and arrived at London airport a day earlier than scheduled and had to spend eight hours in the lounge to catch the first alternative flight home. The hours were dedicated to Mahfouz. From 8 am to 7 pm I read his most celebrated novel, *The Beginning And The End*. I finished it a few minutes after the "fasten seat belts" sign was switched off. Departing from my previous practice of mulling over a book I had read before writing about it, I decided to put my reactions to Mahfouz's novel as soon as I had finished it. I have a habit of recording the exact time and place where I am when I finish a book on its last page. *The Beginning And The End* bears the following inscription on its last page (412). "7.20 pm, 11 April, 1990 BOAC flight 019 London-New Delhi". I haven't ever read such a long

novel in so short a time.

Naguib Mahfouz, born in 1911 in Gamalya, an old quarter of Cairo which is the setting of many of his novels, was a student of philosophy, not literature. His interest in fiction came after he had written dissertations on philosophical subjects. As in India, so in the Arab world, there was no real tradition of novel writing. Mahfouz read whatever he could lay his hands on of modern English, French and Russian novelists in Arabic translations and English. Then he set to writing his own novels combining the Arabic folkloric *latifa* (anecdote) and stringing stories together as in *A Thousand And One Nights*. His themes were of travails suffered by the impoverished, lower-middle class. *The Beginning And The End* is the best example of his work.

Mahfouz is essentially a story teller, not a stylist, an Egyptian Somerset Maugham. Nevertheless, the story grips you through its unpredictable twists and turns. *The Beginning And The End* starts with a bang. Two brothers, Hussien and Hassnein, are sent for by the principal of their school and informed abruptly that their father, a civil servant, has died. They had seen him in good health only a couple of hours earlier at the breakfast

table. They return home in mourning. Other members of the family are introduced to the reader: the widowed mother, Sabira, her three sons, the feckless Hassan, the dutiful Hussien and ambitious Hassnein, and her plain-looking, hunch backed daughter, Nefisa. The family which had been reasonably well-off is suddenly reduced to poverty. They are forced to sell their carpets and furniture in order to survive. Their father's miserable pension is not enough to feed and clothe them. Sabira ration's food, Nefisa takes to stitching clothes, the oldest Hassan takes to singing in cheap cafes, peddling drugs, and becoming the gigolo of a courtesan. The family pin their hopes on Hussien and Hassnein still at school. Hussien is a good boy who gives up studies after he has passed his baccalaureate to take up a job as a clerk in a distant town so that his younger brother can go in for higher studies. When in dire straits, which are often, the family turn to the no-good Hassan living with a prostitute in Cairo's red-light district.

The one to rise above abysmal poverty is the youngest Hassnein who is selfish, self-centred and borrows money from his brothers, sister and friends to get into the military college and become an officer of a cavalry regiment. He begins to have fancy notions of his new status. He ditches the girl he has been engaged to for three years and proposes to the daughter of his rich and influential patron. He persuades the family to move from their poor quarter to an upper class suburb. He tries to persuade his gigolo, hashish-peddling brother to mend his ways—not for any love for him but because it embarrasses him as an officer. His suit for the patron's daughter is rejected. The crash comes when Hassan is seriously injured in an ambush laid by his underworld police. And finally in a police raid on a bordello, Nefisa is arrested. Hassnein feels thoroughly let down by his family and almost forces his sister to commit suicide by jumping into the Nile. He then follows her by jumping into the river himself.

It is a gripping tale because it is starkly truthful of life in Egypt today. It has many parallels in India. •



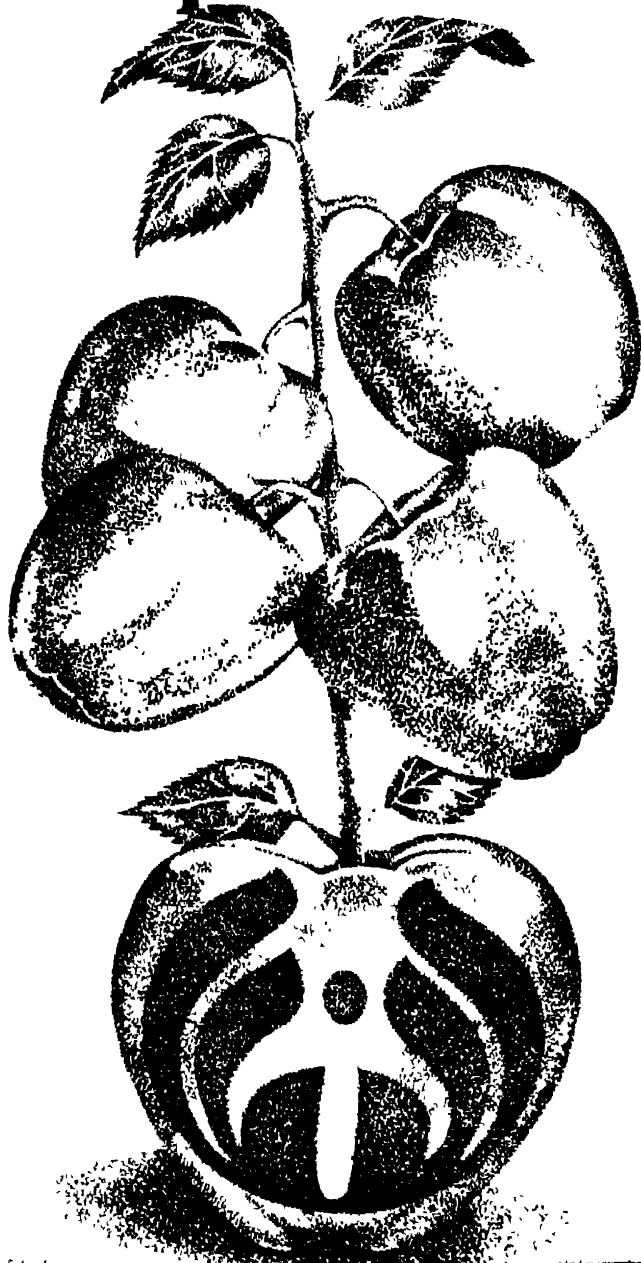
**Mahfouz is essentially a story-teller, not a stylist: an Egyptian Somerset Maugham**



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ABU/THE TELEGRAPH



■ Your electors want peace to return to Punjab and they are not interested in the foolish controversy you (Mann) have created

**RAM JETHMALANI**, Janata Dal MP and lawyer referring to S.S. Mann's unsuccessful attempt to carry the kurpan into Parliament

■ We are apprehensive about the statement of Ram Jethmalani that the solution to the Punjab

problem would be possible before June, because his solution always involves compromising with the worst of terrorists

**M. I. AKBAR**, MP and Congress(I) spokesman

■ We have never been sensitised to war. None of us, not even during the Second World War, have seen bombs falling (over Indian territory). In any conflict, let us be psychologically ready to face it... we do not want to take a scratch

**V.P. SINGH**, Prime Minister, on the possibility of war with Pakistan over Kashmir

■ It is high time that Pakistan realised India's might and desisted from interfering in the internal affairs of the country.

**L.K. ADVANI**, BJP president

■ I will go on working for the Congress and for my leader as long as I am alive.

**NANDINI SATPATHY**, Congress(I) member, after resigning from the post of president of the Orissa Pradesh Congress(I) Committee

■ It's much more pleasurable to give happiness to others than to be happy alone. I don't think I'm fit to have a child of my own. I don't think I am capable of looking after a child.

**DR INDIRA HINDUJA**, pioneer of the In Vitro Fertilisation process in India, on why she has chosen to remain a spinster

■ I didn't directly threaten to kill V.P. Singh or Rajiv Gandhi. If the Indian Army kills our innocent men and women, people would be

within their moral right to kill the Prime Minister. I have not said I am going to kill them.

**AMANULLAH KHAN**, JKLF leader

■ Even if the script is bad they should still have allowed Joffe to shoot. Otherwise it may seem that the state has something to hide.

**APARNA SEN**, actress, on Roland Joffe not being allowed to shoot *The City Of Joy*





# Out in the cold

*Increasing dissidence diminishes the authority of Rajiv Gandhi*



There are a few things in life worse than being confused with a failing and ageing filmstar (Vinod Khanna), but such is Mami Shankar Aiyar's reputation for getting matters

right that a faint smile is all that is necessary in response. Meanwhile, for Rajiv Gandhi's sake I hope Aiyar's dodgy grasp on reality does not intrude into the quality of advice he renders to his master. Because, as strange things begin to happen in God's own party, life at the top is hotting up for Rajiv Gandhi.

At the last Congress Working Committee meeting, with Rajiv in attendance, criticism of the famous "coterie" was rampant with many a speaker noting that the president continued to be inaccessible to those who constitute the "real" party. Sops were thrown in by promises of early organisational elections and another shuffle of general secretaries was executed, but the charge remained on the table. Rajiv was kept locked up with Mami Shankar Aiyar and a few others holding the keys. Vasant Sathe, in fact, declared rather patronisingly, that left to himself Rajiv was a good chap but he was easily misled and prone to taking unreliable advice from people who had no "roots" in the country.

Now we have a new body calling itself the Congress Forum for Action sprouting up. While it is presently made up of known dissidents with relatively meagre clout, its support within the party, from Rajiv's point of view, is growing alarmingly. The Forum is unambiguous in its criticism of the leader's "style of functioning" and generally avoids praising him or endorsing the notion that he is indispensable. Last week the Forum received a powerful shot in the arm when Kamlapati Tripathi joined in and attacked the "culture of flattery and sycophancy" currently destroying the Congress fashioned by Jawaharlal. Tripathi's cry of despair, released to

the press by the Forum, makes poignant reading and confirms that he has given up on Rajiv. "If the Congress is to be saved, a new leader has to be elected" is the summary of Kamlapati's message to the faithful.

Are we, then, witnessing a full-fledged revolt? I don't think so, but more than mere tremors are certainly in the air. The Congress has a long-established tradition of not attacking the supreme leader. At the state level *chappals* and microphones can be thrown at a chief minister, but members of the high command are expected to behave, in public at least, with a measure of decorum and dignity. They may hatch dastardly conspiracies behind closed doors but rushing to the press to air grievances against colleagues is considered bad form. In the Opposition, when it is in power, precisely the opposite tradition prevails. Here, it is the leader of the parliamentary party (i.e., the Prime Minister) who is singled out for virulent condemnation and all the ills of his party and the government are placed at his door. No euphemism like "coterie" is used; he is denounced by name. Like his predecessor Morarji Desai in 1977, Prime Minister V P. Singh has to come out into the open and battle his adversaries.

Not so in "the natural party of government". Indira Gandhi's '77 election defeat in the wake of the Emergency was ascribed to the activities of the "caucus", even Sanjay was not mentioned by name. Currently, it is the "inexperienced, non-political coteries" (K C Pant's felicitous phrase) who are blamed rather than the person who spawned them.

It is extraordinary and baffling that the one individual who single-handedly fashioned and executed the

Congress' defeat has escaped direct censure. After all, it was not only Rajiv's disastrous leadership, but also the widespread public perception that he was personally corrupt that led to the party's rejection at the polls. In even a moderately virile democracy the concerned leader would have immediately tendered his resignation as party leader—and it would have been accepted immediately.

In New Delhi the first thing that the Congress did after being routed was "reaffirm its faith in the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi". And when Rajiv led his flock to a second electoral humiliation within two months of the first, a twin strategy was adopted. By some statistical jugglery, it was sought to be proven that the party had actually done quite well and if that alibi left a few unconvinced, the results were as expected refrain was hoisted. Thus, since criticism of the leader is invari-





ably camouflaged in the Congress, one must look for nuances and code word protests to judge his standing. Of course, it has to be admitted that while just before and just after the general election, various scenarios were being sketched through which Rajiv was to be ousted, at present not only have the scenarios been jettisoned but some of the leading players of the scenarios—N D Tiwari, K C Pant, Narasimha Rao—have taken a backseat.

Nevertheless, the mounting criticism of the coterie in public and the emergence of organised and clearly hostile pressure groups within the party suggests that for the first time Rajiv Gandhi's leadership of the Congress is seriously threatened.

The principal reason why even a routed Congress rallied behind Rajiv was because the National Front government seemed permanently on the verge of collapse. In the Central Hall of Parliament, Congress MPs were busy calculating the date and month of its demise. "Internal contradictions" was the favoured symptom and 90 days was the maximum life awarded. In this time-frame Rajiv Gandhi became a critical factor, since with him continuing to be at the helm the nation could be offered a stable government-in-waiting.

**A**las, the 90 days have passed and the government shows no signs of disintegrating. If anything it is demonstrating an unsuspected capacity for resilience as it successfully combats one crisis after another. Initially, there was much expectation that the "unholy wedlock" would hasten the downfall with either the BJP or the communists pulling the rug from under V P Singh's feet. That expectation has been belied. Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar have tried their tricks, but the former seems to have been tamed, while the Old Turk must be greatly discomfited by the fact that when he confirmed his sensational charge in Parliament the only cheers he received were from Messrs Sathe Chidambaram and Akbar.

So, the government despite Meham, despite resignations at the highest levels, despite grave provocation from across the border and escalating terrorist violence in many states, is buckling down to the long haul ahead. Perhaps it won't survive till 1995, but for next two years or

so it appears V P Singh will not be changing residence.

That's bad news for Rajiv Gandhi and his handlers. As the durability of this government becomes more and more apparent, demands for leadership change from within the party will mount. Whatever their loyalties and intellectual calibre, even the most cowardly and cretinous MP will not risk going into another general election (say in 1992 or '93) under Rajiv. If there is one thing the Congressman understands it is survival and perks.

Unlike his mother, the former Prime Minister has neither the stomach nor the wit to rejuvenate and reinvigorate a defeated party. Can you imagine Rajiv perched on an elephant riding into some remote part of the country? Can you imagine Rajiv burning the

midnight oil with the Working Committee or a select group of senior functionaries devising a strategy for the 1990s? That sounds too much like hard work.

Even if the former Prime Minister agreed to perform the task the party would not trust him with it. It knows that while sticking to Rajiv has certain advantages—the Nehru name, the appeal to youth, a commitment to frontier technology—all these virtues only count when the party's shattered morale is restored. Alas, there is nothing in Rajiv's genes and record to suggest that he can begin the morale-restoring task.

After Rajiv, who? Well, this is a matter for the Congress to decide, but I am sure a 100-year old party is capable of finding an improvement on its present leader. Doubtless, it will be put about that there is no one else, that despite his gigantic weaknesses the present incumbent is the best bet. However, this argument is so patently motivated that it will find few takers. At any rate, if I was a Congress MP I would argue thus: We are going to lose under Rajiv anyway, so why not take a chance with a new face?

I used to wonder why Rajiv's handlers fly into paroxysms of rage when anyone suggested that the National Front government might last even a third of the full term. Now I know why. Their jobs are at stake. •

**Kamlaapati  
Tripathi's  
message:  
"If the  
Congress is  
to be saved,  
a new  
leader has  
to be  
elected"**

**Rajiv Gandhi at the recent Congress Working Committee meeting: easily misled**





# Up in smoke

*Delhi has scant regard for fire safety norms*

**D**elhi could be paying dearly for being over-materialistic, thoughtless and uncaring. In the space of a few days, as many as four fires ravaged the city's premier official conference centre, Vigyan Bhavan, an overcrowded market, 1,200 huts of a slum and the records room of another government building, Nirman Bhavan. The losses ran into several crores. But even as the smoke billowed from the buildings and the ashes drifted in the breeze, an indignant S K Dheri, the Delhi Fire Service (DFS) chief, was certain the city hadn't learnt a basic lesson: that fire safety came before anything else. Ironically, the incident occurred during the fire safety week, 14 to 20 April, an event held to commemorate the heroism of 68 firemen who died fighting flames on a ship in Bombay 46 years ago.

"We have imitated the lifestyles and architecture of the West, but not their safety culture," Dheri says, leaning back in his chair in the DFS headquarters, hidden behind Delhi's Connaught Place supermarket. "We spent lakhs on exterior and interior decoration because we want our high-rises and houses to look expensive. But we don't spend anything on fire-protection." It is a matter of habit that house-owners, builders, shopkeepers and even the government do not bother to think of emergencies, until they actually arise. Being far-sighted is not worth the expense, they believe.

So fires continue to break out in Delhi with agonising frequency. It is as though it was a city of pyromaniacs. Take the Vigyan Bhavan fire, for instance. The annual meeting of inspectors-general and directors-general of police organised by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) was in progress in one of the committee rooms of Vigyan Bhavan on 16 April. An information officers conference was also on in another section of the building. The fire in the committee room, where about 200 officers had assembled, was detected a little after 3.15 in the

afternoon. "We noticed sparks in a corner of the ceiling," an officer recalls, "but we began vacating the hall only after the embers started falling. The power was switched off. Delhi's police commissioner Vijay Karan thought that the fire was caused by a short-circuit, but he hastened to add that this was a matter for the inquiry committee to decide. Vigyan Bhavan gets its power supply through a high tension cable. The supply could come from Nirman Bhavan, the National Archives or Shastri Bhavan, all government structures located nearby.

The fire didn't take long to spread. It devoured the readily combustible false ceiling and wood-panelling, filled the whole building with smoke and melted down the thick coating of coal-tar on the roof. (The coal-tar is meant to prevent water from leaking through.) Forty fire tenders fought to control the flames till 8.30 the next morning. But despite their best efforts, about 75 per cent of the building was destroyed. The main hall with a seating capacity of 1,000 was completely gutted. "The floor of the prestigious hall now looks into the sky," a fire officer remarked.

"It seems to have started from a short circuit," said an electrical engineer, M L Kaul, who works in Vigyan Bhavan. He agreed that the possible causes of a fire from a short circuit are poor wiring and an increase in the load. But the load of the build-

**Says Delhi Fire Service chief S.K. Dheri: "No one thinks of emergencies until they actually arise. Being far-sighted is not worth the expense, they believe"**



ing had also not increased for the last three years, he pointed out. That left the problems of wiring. It was hard to believe the electrical lining in Vigyan Bhavan was of poor quality. The Bhavan had been renovated for the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meet (CHOGM), and is supposed to be the country's most well-equipped conference centre. But over the last five years it is only "security" that has received priority over other areas. And even the entrances and exits to the halls are limited.

As Delhi's Lt Governor Arjan Singh told journalists who met him when he arrived at Vigyan Bhavan after the fire erupted, that there should have been adequate precautions against the mishap. Curiously, the gap between the false ceiling and the concrete roof of the structure was stuffed with cotton. For a building that receives power through a high tension





**Fire tenders fighting the blaze at Vigyan Bhavan: lack of safety measures**

cable, it was unthinkable to have such a vast quantity of combustible material near the wiring. The inquiry committee now will have to find out who or what was to blame for the devastating fire. But authorities rule out the theory that it was the work of Punjab terrorists.

Vigyan Bhavan was built in 1956 at the instance of Jawaharlal Nehru. The first meet it hosted was the UNESCO conference the same year. The building was entrusted to the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). The original design of the building—which was built somewhat in the style of British-made structures such as the National Archives and the

museum in the vicinity—was the creation of the CPWD architect, R.L. Gehlote. But two decades later, Indira Gandhi approved the new designs

**Lt Governor Arjan Singh at the fire site: perturbed**



made by architects Satish Gujral and C.P. Kukreja. The building was renovated in 1983 at a cost of Rs two crores. Since then, virtually all major international conferences in India have been held here. Experts feel that it will take a full year to repair Vigyan Bhavan, which means that Delhi will be without a world-class conference centre during this period.

**T**he blaze that destroyed 200 shops in Sadar Bazar, a crowded wholesale market, the same evening, was not wholly unexpected. Shopkeepers in Gandhi Market, the most congested marketplace in the area, are bitter about the increasing load on the electrical system due to the unauthorised structures coming up on the terraces of existing shops, courtesy the civic authorities. According to Zaki Ahmed, who owns a stall very close to where the fire broke out, the source of the fire was the sparks from an electric pole. The sparks evidently burnt some combustible material which dropped on to the tarpaulin of a pen shop below. From there the flames engulfed a furniture shop before burning down the entire Gandhi

market and a branch of the Central Bank of India.

Says Raghuvansh Singhal, the BJP councillor from the area, "It looked as though it was Diwali, with the whole place lit up, and crackers going off now and then." The Gandhi Market, which is cramped with shops selling plastics, hosiery goods, artificial jewellery, and cosmetics, literally exploded in flames. Fortunately, the shopkeepers had enough time to escape. But many of them were unable to carry with them all their goods. It was a stubborn fire that continued for two days.

The fire was detected as soon as it occurred—around 6.50 pm. "We tried putting it out with four firefighting cylinders," Ahmed exclaimed. But it didn't help. A telephone call was made to the fire brigade around the same time. "But they only turned up at 7.15 pm," Ahmed complained.



# All the defaulters

*The government continues to violate fire safety laws with impunity*

**F**ire safety laws are a joke in Delhi. Nobody takes them seriously, least of all, the government.

As many as 158 buildings continue to violate fire safety norms in the capital. The list reads like a directory of government offices, among the defaulters are the headquarters of Delhi Police, the offices of the Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Minar and Vikas Bhavan, Sena Bhavan, Akashvani Bhavan, the civil aviation ministry headquarters, the National Archives, Indian Airlines House, the Foreign Post Office, planning ministry headquarters, Mohan Singh Place, Shakti Sadan, Baroda House, Nirman Bhavan, Krishi Bhavan, government hospitals such as G.B. Pant Hospital, Maulana Azad Medical College Hospital, Ram Monahar Lohia Hospital, the WHO building, Atma Ram House, Vikrant Tower, one of the capital's most popular government-owned hotels, the Ashok Yatri Niwas, and, of course, Vigyan Bhavan.

Out of the 158 buildings, only 24 have submitted plans for installing fire safety equipment—and Vigyan Bhavan was not one of them. The

private builders have asked for time till the end of the year to install safety equipment. The DFS is yet to make up its mind.

Among private structures, the congested Rohit House has still not complied with fire safety regulations, despite repeated reminders. Recently, fires broke out in Nirman Bhavan, Rohit House and the National Archives. Curiously, Gopala Towers, where the city's worst fire broke out in 1983, was again served a notice in 1987 for violating safety norms. This proves the point that people in the city are not any wiser even after they have suffered the effects of callous neglect

displeasure clear. Vijay Bhatia, the secretary of the Sadar Bazar Traders Association, accused the Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking for not shutting off the power for 15 minutes and preventing the fire from spreading. Civic officials complained that the firemen were hampered in their work by the scarcity of water in the locality. It was only after the Air Force sent a water tanker that the situation was brought under control after a day. "But by then," says Subhash Sharma, an angry shopkeeper, "the losses had run into crores."

This wasn't Sadar Bazar's first fire, though. Traders in the area recall devastating fires in 1957, 1964, 1971 and 1987, when the flames engulfed as many as 50 shops in Gandhi Market and the adjoining Shiv Market. The principal cause has always been an electrical short-circuit, as also overloading due to numerous illegal connections from a single pole. The overloading is a direct result of the profusion of illegal structures. "All con-

structions up to the first floor in this area are legal," said Chand Singh, a trader, adding, "The rest are unauthorised." That meant the Gandhi Market, where the fire broke out, has an electrical load that was more than double its authorised capacity. "But this is only possible because of the cooperation of the electric supply and civic authorities," Singh said. He even suspected the involvement of top politicians behind the unauthorised constructions.

**A** third big fire broke out in the capital the day after the Vigyan Bhavan and Sadar Bazar disasters. More than 1,200 huts of a slum called Adarsh Nagar, in the New Subzi Mandi area, were reduced to ashes in the twilight hours. A chicken and fish market located near the slum was also gutted, leaving a stench of burnt fowl. According to Dheri, it could have been started by a lamp. The fire brigade rushed to the spot and managed to bring it under control within an hour. In yet another incident

"And when they came, they discovered they didn't have enough water to put the fire out." People in the area had to use water from the gutters to fight the fire initially. Ahmed added angrily, "The fire in Vigyan Bhavan got priority." According to S.K. Dheri, the first fire tender to reach the market was from a nearby fire station. He didn't deny the delay. "But from experience I can tell you that till today, never have I heard that the fire brigade had reached on time. We are always blamed for being late."

It took over 22 fire tenders to fight the Sadar Bazar flames. Twenty four hours after the tragedy, some of the shops were still burning. When Lt Governor Arjan Singh, H.K.L. Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler and the BJP MP V.K. Malhotra arrived at the spot, shopkeepers and residents made their



**Ansal Bhavan in flames: no one learnt any lessons**



the next day, the accounts and official records of a government department in Nirmal Bhavan, which houses the offices of the health ministry—close to Vigyan Bhavan—were destroyed. The destruction of records has led to administrative problems. In fact, the records room seemed a likely place for a fire. It was stuffed with papers and files.

The cause of the Vigyan Bhavan fire is still unknown. But Dheri agrees that short-circuits and overloading—which were the most likely causes of the Sadar Bazar and Vigyan Bhavan fires—are frequent occurrences in Delhi. The Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking Act prohibits sub-billing of electric meters. But this is a law observed more in the breach. Houses are built and subdivided, and unauthorised electrical connections taken out. The only way to check the menace is by preventing unauthorised construction. But the Sadar Bazar area stands testimony to the helplessness of the civic authorities.

It is precisely because of its rampant disregard for the law that Delhi is so notoriously fire-prone. According to R M Gupta, an elderly resident of Babar Road who has been fighting a battle against the nearby Holiday Inn five star hotel—one of the major causes of fires is the misuse of basements by high-rise builders. After the Gopala Towers fire in 1983, he says, the then Lt Governor had issued orders to clear high-rise buildings'

basements of unauthorised occupants. "But builders continue to misuse basements due to loopholes in the law," he complains.

It took three major fires in Delhi—at Gopala Towers, Siddharth Hotel and Ansal Bhavan—to tighten fire safety regulations. The law now makes it compulsory for all old structures to maintain a certain proportion of each floor as a "refuge area", to enable occupants to escape in the event of an emergency. The refuge area cannot be encroached upon. All buildings have to keep firefighting equipment. The requirements for high-rise buildings and hotels are more elaborate—sprinklers, fire alarms, and fire escapes. A hotel cannot obtain a com-

pletion certificate unless the (Central Fire Organisation) CFO certifies that it has met all the necessities.

**B**ut then, the ingenious—of whom ways finds a way to get around the law. One of the prime motives of builders is to grab more floor space than they are allowed. A maximum of 400 FAR (floor area ratio) is permissible in the central business district (CBD) around Connaught Place. This means if a plot has a built-up area of 50 per cent, construction is allowed upto eight floors. The ratio of the built-up area to the ground is 400:1. But builders manage to grab more FAR by misusing basements and creating additional

this year," Dheri says. The DFS also runs a special "harvest season" service by temporarily setting up four additional stations, in the event of crop fires resulting from disputes. The DFS's prime possession includes an imported hydraulic platform that can be used to rescue people from the 18th floor of a building and pumps that can jet water to a height of 90 metres.

But that doesn't mean much when a fire engine has to be rushed to a crowded Sadar Bazar marketplace through narrow alleys. The trouble, Dheri points out, is that Delhi has grown over the years. "Today there are 70,000 industrial units, 8,00,000 working people and 1.6 million vehicles on the roads." That increases the



**Gutted shops at Sadar Bazar: the losses ran into crores**

floor space. What is more, they do nothing to beef up fire-safety arrangements for the additional FAR. Space is at a premium, not lives.

There are other problems, too. S K Dheri says the Delhi Fire Service (DFS) does not have the capacity to tackle two major fires simultaneously. It operates on a shoestring budget of Rs 3.5 crores, of which Rs 3 crores is spent on salaries and uniforms. "That leaves us with just Rs 50 lakhs for equipment, maintenance and modernisation," Dheri adds. The actual requirements, he argues, is at least twice the budget. The DFS has a total of 23 fire stations in the city, with three to seven fire engines in each. "Four more stations are to come up

burden on the fire service. Crowded roads also make things more difficult. Last year, the DFS responded to 15,000 telephone calls, of which 7,341 turned out to be fires and rest, "other emergencies", such as drowning, house collapses, road accidents, malicious calls and even calls to rescue animals. Some 85 people died. The DFS functions as efficiently as it can, despite the complaints against it.

Even the fact that last year property worth Rs 6.3 crores was lost to fires and Dheri's men saved property worth Rs 25 crores isn't reason enough for the city to guard itself against disaster. Delhi is destined to learn the long hard way. ●

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



# Friends and foes

*Have Devi Lal and Ajit Singh decided to bury the hatchet?*

**W**ho is the boss of the Janata Dal? Everybody, it seems. For a party which perhaps has more leaders than followers, power games are an integral part of the Dal culture. Alliances are forged between heavyweights solely to outwit rival factions. Thus only a few months back, deputy prime minister Devi Lal was a sworn enemy of industries minister Ajit Singh. But soon after V P Singh announced that he would reshuffle the Cabinet, Devi Lal and Ajit Singh decided to bury the hatchet, albeit temporarily, so that the other power centres within the Janata Dal did not wrest the initiative. But whatever be the reason, the reported unity moves between the Devi Lal camp and the Ajit Singh group is the best thing that could have happened to the Janata Dal in recent times. For, at one time it seemed that the rivalry between the two leaders would tear the party apart.

Of course, Devi Lal himself has not made any efforts to make up with Ajit Singh. Political observers have based

their speculations on the moves made by the deputy prime minister's chief lieutenant, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Of late, Yadav has been meeting Ajit Singh regularly and sources close to the UP chief minister confirmed that the two have decided to forget the past and be friends.

But why did Mulayam Singh Yadav suddenly decide to befriend Ajit Singh? When the former teamed up with Devi Lal, he did so solely because he wanted to retain his grip over the erstwhile Lok Dal unit in Uttar Pradesh and keep Ajit Singh at bay. In 1987, Devi Lal became the chief minister of Haryana and began playing a leading role in Opposition politics at the Centre. A wily Mulayam Singh rightly thought that with Devi Lal's backing, he could one day emerge as the chief minister of UP. Subsequent events proved that Yadav was not very wrong and had it not been for the Haryana strongman's support, he could never have defeated Ajit Singh in the race for the UP chief ministership. Moreover, there must be

a lurking ambition within Mulayam Singh to play a greater role in national politics. For, if Devi Lal could have achieved so much by virtue of being the chief minister of Haryana, Mulayam Singh Yadav can demand more, since he is governing the most important state in the country.

**Mulayam Singh Yadav (right) with Ajit Singh: survival comes first**



Such aspirations have forced Mulayam Singh Yadav to rework his strategy. Though Devi Lal is still in command at the Centre, Ajit Singh is no pushover either. And in Uttar Pradesh, the Dal faction owing allegiance to the Union industries minister is marginally smaller than the group led by the chief minister. Mulayam Singh knows very well that he will not be able to rule very long without the support of all sections of the party. The present compromise suits Ajit Singh very well. He has realised that it would be foolhardy to try





**Ajit Singh and Devi Lal with V.P. Singh: compromise is the name of the game**

and unseat Mulayam Singh. In the circumstances, it would be best to forget the differences and try and get as many of his nominees appointed to positions of power in Uttar Pradesh. And the chief minister has reportedly agreed to accommodate the Union minister's candidates.

**T**hat the two leaders were serious about coming together was proved after Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ajit Singh agreed to field two candidates each from their respective camps for the forthcoming elections to the UP Legislative Council. Recently, Yadav and Singh met over breakfast at Devi Lal's residence to thrash out their differences. Over 18 other Janata Dal MPs, including Rasheed Masood, Harish Pal and Jagpat Dhankar, were also present. Ajit Singh, however, denied that the morning meeting was meant to bring him and Devi Lal together. "We had general discussions

and nothing specific was discussed either at this meeting or at the dinner held earlier at Chand Ram's place," the industries minister clarified. When asked whether he had softened his stand on the Meham issue, Ajit Singh said that the unanimous decision of the party's political affairs committee on the issue was well known and it was now up to the Prime Minister to take action.

The story about a possible rapprochement between Ajit Singh and Devi Lal began doing its rounds in the capital after the Union industries minister attended a dinner party hosted by Chand Ram where Devi Lal was also among the invitees. The Devi Lal faction later leaked the news to the press hinting that the dinner party was meant to strike a responsive chord between the two warring Jat leaders. Soon followed the breakfast at Devi Lal's residence and political observers were sure that Ajit Singh and the deputy prime minister had shaken hands.

And there are plenty of reasons why the two should make up. After all Meham will soon be forgotten but



**If Hegde becomes the party president, the Dandavate-Fernandes axis will gain the upper hand. And both Devi Lal and Ajit Singh want to prevent this**

once Ramakrishna Hegde becomes the party president, the Madhu Dandavate-George Fernandes axis will gain the upper hand. And both Devi Lal and Ajit Singh are aware that either of them alone may not be able to fight the socialists within the Janata Dal.

Moreover, there is a fear that among the major constituents of the Janata Dal, the Jan Morcha may soon bag a large share of power, both at the Centre and in the state. Already, out of the dozen-odd Jan Morcha MPs there are as many as four Cabinet ministers besides a number of ministers of state. It is thus imperative that Devi Lal and Ajit Singh bury the hatchet to protect the interests of the Lok Dal.

But it is perhaps Devi Lal who needs Ajit Singh's support badly. Issues like Meham and others have isolated the deputy prime minister within the Janata Dal. And if the two Jats come together, it may well be a victory for Chandra Shekhar, who is waiting in the wings to humble Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh. •

**Kuldeep Kumar/New Delhi**



# Demoralised diplomats

*How IFS officers have been treated shabbily over the years*



Having reported in this column several weeks ago that the moves to ease out foreign secretary S K Singh had ended and that the able and energetic man

holding the top slot in the foreign service would stay on until the end of his tenure on 15 February, 1991, I owe it to readers to explain why I went wrong and failed to foresee the dismal denouement that unfolded itself on 18 April. On the afternoon of that day the news of Singh's resignation, submitted to the Prime Minister 24 hours earlier, became public.

Even if S K Singh's resignation was somewhat sudden, there was nothing surprising in the subsequent appointment as the new foreign secretary of Muchkund Dubey, also an officer of ability and drive. From the moment, at the beginning of the year, when talk of Singh's possible ouster had started, it was taken for granted that he would be replaced by Muchkund.

Since the text of S K Singh's letter to V P Singh had already been published, there is no need to go into the tortuous details of how the issue came to a head. However, a few significant points need to be underscored.

First, it is clear that from the word go, the present government did not want Singh to continue as foreign secretary. Hence the offer to him to take a pick of the embassy in Washington, the high commission in London and the permanent mission to the United Nations. Now, foreign secretaries on completion of their tenure and after retirement are sent as ambassadors to important countries. But, as S K Singh pointed out in his letter to the Prime Minister, foreign secretaries, sent away in the midst of their tenure, cannot make successful envoys.

No wonder then that S K Singh turned down the multiple choices of ambassadorship. Since it is the right of every government to have a foreign secretary of its choice, it was open to the Janata Dal ministry to do then

what it has done now—to let S K Singh go. But it did not do that. Instead, it asked him to become Governor of Himachal Pradesh which, too, he declined. Would he prefer governorship of Tamil Nadu, he was then asked tentatively. But, as his letter to the PM says, the matter was not pursued.

It was at this stage that the crisis with Pakistan over Kashmir escalated. The Prime Minister asked S K Singh to go on a special mission to Moscow first and then to Washington and the UN headquarters in New York. At the same time, V P Singh reportedly told his top aides and advisers that the foreign secretary should not be disturbed.



Singh: an unceremonious exit

This was the backdrop to the earlier despatch the content of which ought to have been confirmed by the appreciation of Singh's work in Moscow, Washington and New York, openly expressed by both the Prime Minister and the foreign minister.

Then, suddenly, a week before S K Singh put in his papers, he was asked, more than once, to relinquish the office of foreign secretary and become a Governor. Assam was mentioned first and Punjab later, which meant that the government would not have minded transferring Nirmal Mukarji, the current incumbent of Raj Bhavan in Chandigarh, to some other state. S K Singh's answer to all the offers was a firm no. Indeed, he found the

whole thing "strange and humiliating". Few civil servants in his place would have acted the way he did.

This brings one to the most curious part of the whole sordid story. It is that no one is prepared to say who wanted Singh to go and why. Even after he decided to say farewell to the government, all concerned told him how greatly they valued his work and how sorry they were to lose his services. Each said that he was keen to see S K Singh stay but some other mysterious forces willed otherwise.

For years on end, the foreign service's morale has been low. The service sees itself treated with scant respect. It is not fortuitous that the IFS has also lost its attraction to the

**For years on end, the foreign service's morale has been low. The service sees itself treated with scant respect. It is not fortuitous that the IFS has also lost its attraction to the younger generation of Indians**

younger generation of Indians. Time was when those topping the list of successful candidates in the competition for all-India services used to fight one another to get into the foreign service. Now, it has only few takers.

Inder Goyal was present at a meeting of the IFS association in February, at which speakers made no secret of their unhappiness with what had been and was being done, to their service. Most IFS officers today see S K Singh's ouster as no less shabby than the sacking of one of his predecessors, A P Venkateswaran, live on television by the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. It cannot but deliver one more shattering blow to the foreign service's morale, cohesion and efficacy.



# Yes, he still rules

*But it is time V.P. Singh took a hard look at himself*

# A

t long last, Prime Minister V.P. Singh's supporters have begun admitting that the Raja's is a weak government incapable of meeting the serious challenges facing the nation. "To meet such challenges, there is an urgent need for a national government comprising the National Front, the Congress(I), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the left," clarified one of Singh's admirers. I have no intention of embarrassing the Prime Minister's drumbeaters by reminding them of what they said less than 150 days ago when their "hero" assumed office. But it is a good sign that they have begun to recognise that the Centre is weak, as a result of which the country today is plunged in turmoil.

How did things come to such a pass? Around mid-1987, an incompetent Rajiv Gandhi allowed all political initiative to slip into the hands of Vishwanath Pratap Singh, even though the former was technically the Prime Minister. Since then, it has been Singh who called the shots. But did V.P. Singh use his political authority judiciously?

Surrounded by sycophants, the Prime Minister succeeded in deflecting the nation's attention from grave issues of national importance to petty problems—scandals became his pet obsession. Neither did he himself apply his mind to the serious issues nor did he allow the nation to think over them. Can you believe that there is not a single line in the National Front election manifesto on the Punjab and Kashmir crises. But closing one's eyes like an ostrich will not help solve the problems. Meanwhile, the situation in the valley has deteriorated. And, Punjab is going the Kashmir way, while Assam is going the Punjab way.

Passing the buck just won't do any longer. It is no use for V.P. Singh to say that he has inherited the problems from Rajiv Gandhi. The need of the hour is for the Prime Minister to decide what sort of solution he would



V.P. Singh with his supporters: is the honeymoon over?

prefer—in the circumstances a democratic and political solution seems to be the only answer to the problems. The events in Eastern Europe have proved that guns cannot silence a vast majority. Thus, a military solution cannot be a lasting one.

**Surrounded by sycophants, the Prime Minister succeeded in deflecting the nation's attention from grave issues of national importance to petty problems, with scandals becoming his pet obsession**

The Prime Minister's aides in the government are only too keen to include the BJP in it. But the BJP continues to insist on the abrogation of the Article 370. Will it help to bring peace to Kashmir? The BJP is wedded to the idea of a Hindu *rashtra*. Does it help to win the confidence of 15 per cent of the religious minorities in the country. The BJP is committed to convert at least three mosques—at Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi—into temples. Is this not the surest way to start a civil war in the country.

Any government at the Centre which includes the BJP will spell doom. Even the Prime Minister's conscience-keepers have now realised that V.P. Singh will find it difficult to govern with the BJP and the left parties as his props. But the principal reason why the situation in the country has suddenly become so bad is the Centre's dependence on the BJP. And if the BJP finally decides to join the government, it will be a sad day for the country. A national government at the Centre is welcome, but the BJP should be kept out of it. •



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□ The year, 1987. Gopi Krishna Arora, special secretary to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the 1957 batch, is working in his South Block office in New Delhi. Vasant Sathe, the Union minister for energy, knocks deferentially, opens the door and asks politely: "Mr Arora, can I come in?" Arora nods. "Can I come to see you around 9 o'clock tomorrow morning," goes on Sathe. "At your residence?" Arora looks at his watch and tells him no, make it 9.30. "And," says Arora, "come to my office." Sathe smiles and says "thank you" a couple of times and leaves. Right through the exchange, Arora keeps sitting behind his desk and Sathe does all the bowing and scraping.

□ Indira Gandhi International Airport, the VIP reception area, 22 March, 1990, around 1.30 in the afternoon. Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh is returning from Namibia and his Cabinet colleagues are in attendance. Communications and surface transport minister K.P. Unnikrishnan and law minister Dinesh Goswami are sitting together, chatting. Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande, an IAS officer of the 1955 batch, walks in imperiously. He does not even look at the Cabinet ministers, but they scurry over to where Pande is standing, smile greet-



**THE ARCHETYPAL BUREAUCRAT:** Self-confident, self-possessed, well-paid, backed by a powerful network—and knows he is the boss

ings and engage him in polite conversation. Pande looks bored.

□ Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suggests—in writing—that a certain political favourite be appointed as a director

his son-in-law, S.N. Shukla, is a joint secretary at the ministry of textiles and also happens to be friendly with Bhure Lal, an IAS officer and a joint secretary at the Prime Minister's Office.

His resignation is not accepted, he continues as Governor, and Shanker Dayal Singh, the prospective candidate and a Janata Dal heavyweight from Bihar, returns home from Delhi, after a fruitless month of waiting. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Tamil Nadu, ex-IAS and at one time Mrs Gandhi's principal private secretary, stays on too. Every other Governor's—who obviously do not have IAS links—resignation is accepted.

# BABU POWER

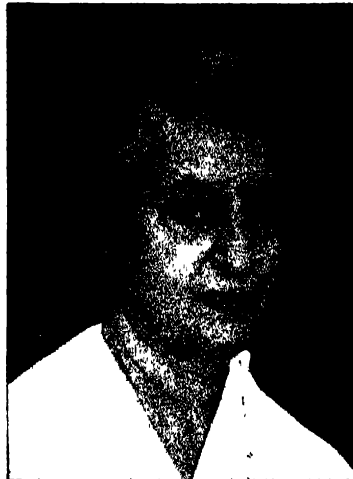
*How bureaucrats rule India*





□In the last administration, Krishna Sahi, education minister, Margaret Alva, minister for sports and youth affairs, and Saroj Kharpade, minister for health, all faced the same problem. Their respective secretaries—after a while—simply refused to deal with them, preferring instead to deal directly with the chief, Union minister for human resources development P V Narasimha Rao. The ministers would not even get some files they requested from their secretaries. The secretaries have their jobs (for example, Anil Bordia, an IAS officer of the 1957 batch, continues to be the education secretary), but the politicians are all out in the cold.

□The chairman of the NOIDA industrial estate in Uttar Pradesh, just across



**INDIRA AND RAJIV GANDHI:** Prime Ministers who rode rough-shod over the babus, and politicised them—in the end making them still more powerful

the border from New Delhi, feels that the area's telephone lines are no good at all. And it is no place to stay or bring the kids up either. So, the IAS officer works it out. He manages to get a telephone from Delhi's Connaught Place exchange routed through to his office in NOIDA (in another state altogether), "easier to stay in touch that way," he says—a feat that Union ministers would find almost impossible to match.

**T**here are some inescapable truths about governance in India: the bureaucrat is the real overlord, while the politician is at best a transitory phenomenon. The bureaucrat formulates the laws and implements them, while making the politician believe he is doing it all. The

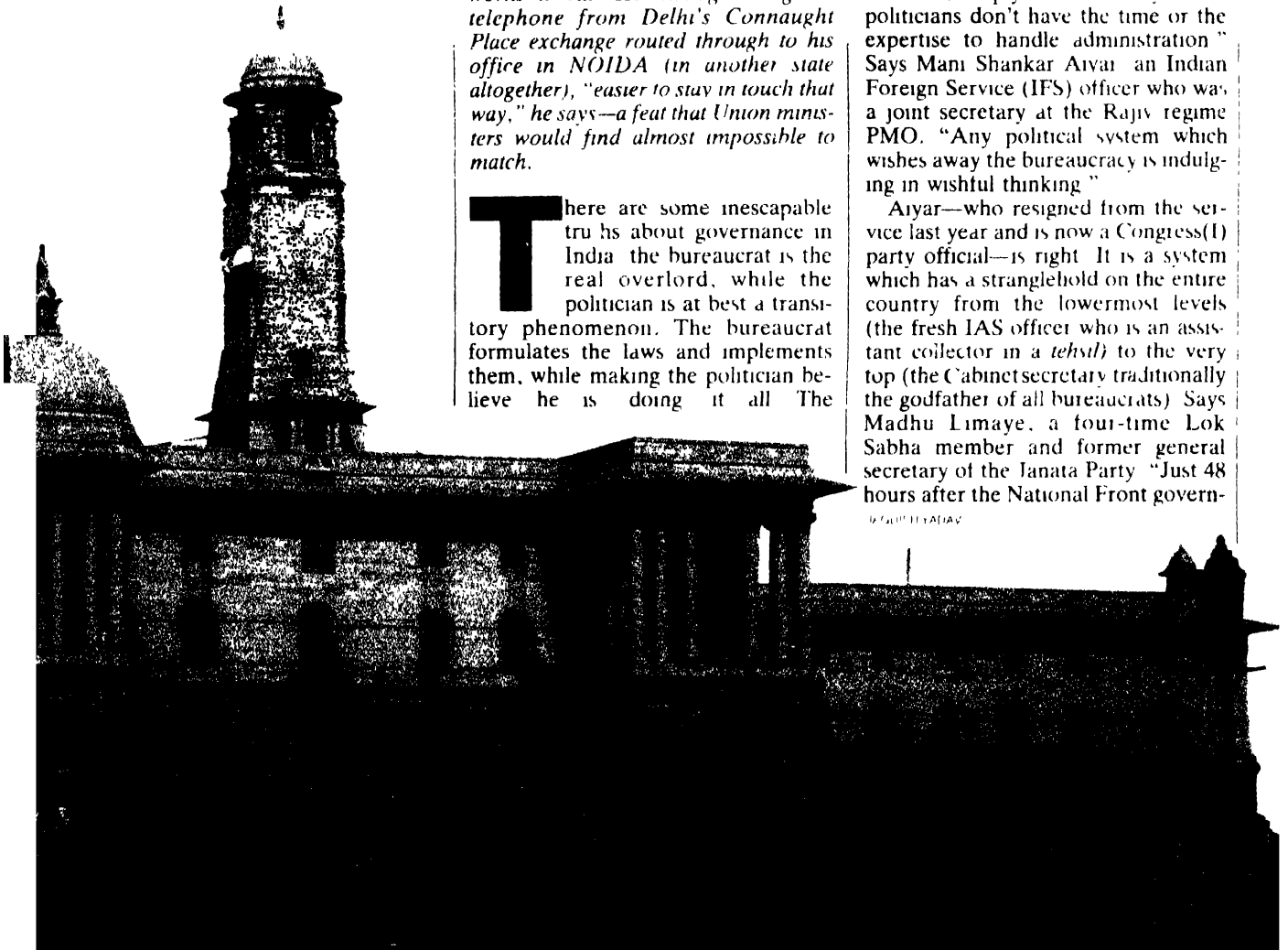
bureaucrat's word counts, while the politician's word is forgotten in a few months—if not days. And if the professional politician did not exist, life would go on. But in the absence of a professional bureaucrat, India would fall flat on its face. He is the power centre, and knows it, protects himself and his ilk, and does everything he can to perpetuate his supremacy. In India, the babu rules. And the most powerful of the babus are undeniably the 6,000 or so officers of the IAS.

"This is a very well-established institution," says Bashiruddin Ahmad, a research

professor at New Delhi's Centre for Policy Research. "For many years now, the committee of secretaries have been running the government, simply because many of the politicians don't have the time or the expertise to handle administration." Says Mani Shankar Aiyar, an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer who was a joint secretary at the Rajiv regime PMO, "Any political system which wishes away the bureaucracy is indulging in wishful thinking."

Aiyar—who resigned from the service last year and is now a Congress(I) party official—is right. It is a system which has a stranglehold on the entire country from the lowermost levels (the fresh IAS officer who is an assistant collector in a *tehsil*) to the very top (the Cabinet secretary traditionally the godfather of all bureaucrats). Says Madhu Limaye, a four-time Lok Sabha member and former general secretary of the Janata Party, "Just 48 hours after the National Front govern-

BY ANIL BHADRA





ment took over (in the first week of December 1989), the (IAS) bureaucrats had captured all the top slots in the ministries." The only non-IAS person who achieved a position at the top was Bimal Jalan, secretary, finance, courtesy his proximity to V.P. Singh.

Even the juniormost IAS officer has tremendous clout, and some of the manifestations are incredible. "I used to go around the *tehsil* in my jeep," says a senior IAS officer about his days as a greenhorn. "And very often, in a village, people would stop the jeep and make me get out. There would be a *shamiana* of sorts and a microphone, and I would have to give a speech. Imagine giving a speech in Marathi, when you can't speak the language." And of course, he would be garlanded and offered sweets, in much the same way a politician is. "If you go around a district," says P. Umashanker, director of New Delhi's Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) and an ex-IAS officer



**BASHIRUDDIN AHMAD**, political scientist: "Because of his own insecurities, the politician starts to politicise the bureaucracy...which can totally distort its function"

(1956 batch), "you will see that the whole world revolves around the collector. He manages everything—elections, rural development, local conflicts, government policies." As well as law—and order.

(Upamanyu Chatterjee, an IAS officer of the 1983 batch and presently an under-secretary in the ministry of human resources development, chronicled an account of a fresh,

wide-eyed, bumbling and easily shocked assistant collector in his book *English August*. The book was well accepted—though not by the IAS fraternity, who saw in its black humour an attempt to paint an archetypal IAS man "It's a pity really," says Chatterjee. Agastya Sen, the protagonist, is not a caricature. I think we should be able to laugh at ourselves—our job is deadly serious.")

Later, when the babu has moved up a few rungs as secretary in a state capital, or as the deputy director of a state-level enterprise, he actually formulates policy. Though, as Aiyar says, a bureaucrat is the "instrument of governance" who "communicates a policy or a programme to reach whom it is intended for" and not someone who actually drafts it. Says Aiyar "In states like Bihar, where politicians are content to just transfer people from one place to another, the bureaucrats

## India's most powerful bureaucrats

### Vinod Pande

*Cabinet secretary*

India's second most powerful man after V.P. Singh. Some of his have gone so far as to the most powerful. An IAS officer of the 1955 batch, the Rajasthan cadre officer was the Raja's revenue secretary when he was finance minister. Knows V.P. Singh from his days in Allahabad and is possibly the only bureaucrat who understands how the Raja works inside out. Rajiv Gandhi shunted him out as secretary, rural development, after the Raja's exit from the Cabinet, but Pande was too valuable an officer to keep out. He helped Panchyati Raj



Bill. After V.P. took over as Prime Minister, he 31 senior bureaucrats to appoint Pande India's number one babu.

### H.P.

*Personal secretary to the Prime Minister*

Like Bhure Lal, a promotee to the IAS. Was the Raja's personal secretary during his

tenure as finance minister in Delhi and later, a member of the Tea Board in London. By the time he returned from London, the Raja was out of favour/power, but Sharma managed the relatively important posting as Uttar Pradesh's additional chief secretary.

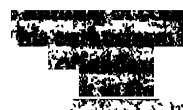
in Delhi. With V.P. Singh's return to power, Sharma was an obvious personal secretary. His clout derives from the Raja's trust and his brief of granting all appointments with the PM.

### Bhure Lal

*Joint secretary, PMO*

Appointed to the IAS in 1971, Uttar Pradesh cadre, after spending five years in the state's services. Pande's friend and a long-time acquaintance of the Raja's. When V.P. Singh was finance minister, he appointed Lal as director, enforcement, to

Singh's exit from





run the show " They decide policy as well as the rules and regulations that direct that policy. That would not do for public consumption, says Aiyar, "so you create the myth that the minister makes the rules and regulations".

And this myth, and the power it shields, grows with the babu's rise through the bureaucracy. The mastery over the magic word "rule" is what a babu thrives on, what lies at the core of his power. The Union minister for energy may say that he wants a power transmission line between Singrauli and Sirsa, perhaps to please his constituents. But the plan has to be processed at the department of power, which needs a clearance from the ministry of environment and the ministry of finance, routed through the bureaucratic levels in those ministries. The babus could stymie the proposal for months, if they wanted to.

A recent example of babu-work is the export-import policy, presented by



**MANI SHANKAR AIYAR**, diplomat, bureaucrat and politician: "Any political system which wishes away the bureaucracy is indulging in wishful thinking"

Union commerce minister Arun Nehru in end-March. Nehru, say numerous bureaucrats, is a capable administrator, but does not have a clue about export or import policies. The bureaucrats drafted the documents and made sure that they held the strings; the policy mentions that paperwork—that time-tested babu power modus—will be reduced and licences will be easier to come by

But the bureaucrat will have discretionary powers to decide which exporter or importer merits a licence, for what purpose, for how long and under which conditions. Nehru will have nothing to do with it. (It is perhaps worthwhile to remember a New Delhi reality, something that even bureaucrats swear by. Dhirubhai Ambani, they say, benefited so much from government largesse not because he had politicians in his pockets, but because he had bureaucrats on his payroll. Politicians may have pressed for returning Ambani's favours, but the babus

actually wrote the policies which helped the Reliance Industries Ltd. supreme.) When private company executives drop in on bureaucrats, top management attends. For example, J.R.D. Tata attends meetings convened by the chief secretary of Maharashtra. It would be unthinkable for someone junior to talk across the table.

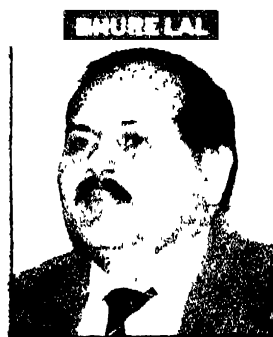
The babus could activate the net-

new dispensation, to do what he does best: probe kickbacks, gather revenue intelligence and be the hatchet-man. Though a relatively junior officer, the Raja's confidence in him adds to his clout.

#### **S.P. Shukla**

*Commerce secretary*

An officer of the Bihar cadre, IAS batch of 1957. Another Raja favourite. Shukla was appointed India's representative to GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) and deputy permanent representative to UNCTAD (United Nations Committee for Trade and Development) in March 1984, with the Raja helping him along. After this appointment, Shukla languished—relatively—as secretary, women's welfare, with V.P. Singh out of the Rajiv Gandhi



Cabinet, till Singh brought him into power-play as commerce secretary. He is the PM's watchdog in the commerce ministry.

#### **T. George Joseph**

*Director, enforcement; ministry of finance*

IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, batch of 1971. Bhure Lal's buddy. Joseph's

grounding in the tax trade is solid. He was appointed UP's sales tax commissioner in 1987, and has liaised at the Union level with both Pande and Lal. A respected officer who was brought in as director, enforcement, on Bhure Lal's recommendation.

#### **Bimal Jalan**

*Finance secretary*

"Not one of us," as an IAS officer puts it, but certainly a top-flight bureaucrat. Chief economic adviser with the Rajiv regime, with the rank of secretary, Jalan made a lasting impression on V.P. Singh the finance minister. Jalan also did a stint as banking secretary in that era. When Singh took over as PM, he brought Jalan back from his posting in Washington as India's

representative at the International Monetary Fund. Jalan, though Raja, was the only man who could fuse the economy and his party's manifesto promises together. Jalan was the man behind the budget and the the first word in economic affairs.





# Salary, perks and the bureaucrat

*Simple things go a long way...*

—"Bride for Agrawal handsome IAS boy 26 of highly placed family. Girl and family main consideration..."

—"Alliance for beautiful, smart homely Brahmin girl 22/ 160 from high status family. Civil service officers preferred, caste no bar..."

Last week, these and numerous other advertisements appeared in Sunday papers all over the country, a hook for the prize catch: an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer. The payout, for the bride's family, may be very high. Currently, IAS probationers—fresh out of training—command dowries of anything between Rs 5 lakhs and Rs 15 lakhs, depending on the person's grade in the civil service examinations and the state he is posted to. Officers from Bihar, for example, rate very highly. A service officer is in such demand that it is not unknown for entire families—mother, father, with prospective bride in tow—to camp for a week or more at Mussoorie, where the IAS training school is located, in the hope of snaring an IAS officer. (The Savoy Hotel in Mussoorie is a favourite hunting ground.)

What makes an IAS officer so attractive that he is clubbed with the traditionally in-demand management graduates, chartered accountants and the US 'green card' holder with increasing regularity? The position, the power and the money. When an officer starts out, he brings home a paycheck of Rs 2,200 a month (up from Rs 750 earlier, courtesy the Fourth Pay Commission's recommendations). This may not seem like much, but along with it come a large bungalow (no matter that it could be in Bomdilla or Banskwara), a jeep or two, a retinue of

servants and the overlordship of a tehsil as an assistant collector. This alone is worth the sky. Stories abound about bureaucrats making a killing from a cut or two, thanks to an obliging timber merchant, transport operator or hooch distiller. The power and the money increase as the immature officer grows into the service, as the collector of a district, or as a district magistrate, a secretary at a state capital or at the Centre.

There is enough to be made on the side. There is a story about a senior officer in the coalfield, who stashes money in his cupboard—

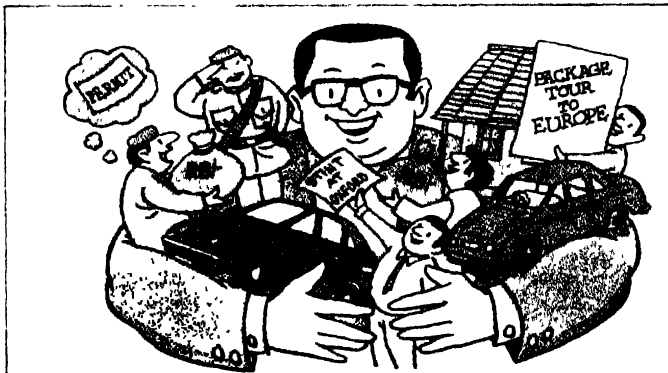
the same line with Sehgal, and life went on. These officers, with more than ten years of service behind them, earn more than Rs 5,000 per month, get a free house, cars, servants, gardeners (who help with farming), guards, holidays and junkets at state expense, and a stint at an American or British university (Oxford is the favourite) to "develop their personalities" for a year or so—also at state expense.

By the time an IAS officer becomes a joint secretary, say in New Delhi, he gets Rs 6,700 as salary, a three-bedroomed house on Humayun Road or Moti Bagh, and perks, besides. A chief secretary to

to a state government gets upto Rs 8,000 a month, as does a full secretary in a central ministry. At the very top, the Cabinet secretary picks up Rs 9,000 per month, less than, say, a middle-level executive with a foreign bank would, but power and privilege do not really show up on a slip of paper. In the higher echelons of service, the

houses get bigger (the plum 'AB' type houses on Pandara Road or Shahjahan Road in Delhi).

And if an IAS officer is a businessman's friend—a not very unusual case—his income from favours granted could total a lifetime's earnings. The new Delhi grapevine talks of incomes in crores of rupees. (New Delhi's Vasant Vihar residential area, billed as prime diplomatic corps real estate, is littered with houses owned by retired—and active—civil servants.) "A managing director in a private company may earn in lakhs," says a senior bureaucrat in New Delhi, "but his reach isn't a patch on what we get, ultimately. Okay, I may not drive around in a Mercedes, but we create and uphold policy. We have the power. And if we want it, all the money we can handle."



cuts from selling a few wagonloads of coal to a black market operator. Or the classic case of making money out of potatoes. A year and a half ago, D.P. Singh was appointed commissioner of the Bareilly sub-division in Uttar Pradesh. Singh could not move into his official residence for six months, because his predecessor, N. Banerjee, had planted a crop of potatoes in the huge garden of his residence, and wanted to stay on till he could cash in on it. Banerjee, in turn, was posted to Agra as commissioner. But his predecessor there, Anadi Sehgal, would not move out either, as he had also planted a potato crop. The take is close to Rs 50,000 per sowing. Finally, an exasperated Singh told Banerjee he could come back to collect his crop, if he would please move out. Banerjee tried



work to take on the ministers, even if they are pushy, as Devi Lal the nation's deputy prime minister (not, repeat not the agriculture minister), undoubtedly is. Take the case of Kripam Punia, an ex-IAS officer, and his son, Panna Lal (an IAS officer of the 1971 batch), who is presently managing director of the Pradeshya Industrial and Investment Corp. of UP (PICUP). The senior Punia resigned from the service to join Lal's Cabinet (when he was chief minister of Harvaha) as the state's minister of industry. He fought with Lal, left the Cabinet and participated in a revolt against the next ministry led by Lal's son. Om Prakash Chautala. Lal was livid (he had once said that he would make Punia the President of India) and when he moved to New Delhi, asked his protégé, UP CM —



Mulayam Singh Yadav, to kick the younger Punia out of PICUP. What Lal had not accounted for was Panna Lal's friendship with Bhure Lal, a Raja favourite and currently a joint secretary at the PMO. Bhure Lal, also an IAS officer, backed Punia. Needless to say, Punia continues as the PICUP chief.

It can be argued that much of the power of a bureaucrat is not derived from the system but from the proximity to a powerful individual. For example, Sanjay Gandhi enjoyed power because Indira happened to be his mother; he did not have to be a babu to do that. Gopi Arora benefited from his association with Indira because she trusted him. It so happened that he was an IAS officer. But, the malice—if one could call it that—of the babu actually lies far deeper, in a power-structure built into the system. India inherited a bureaucracy with a colonial structure, which the English imposed on us, a system designed to serve the masters, and not the people. (A light example: the budget in India is presented in the afternoon so that the masters in England could peruse it in the morning, the Greenwich Mean

Time being the standard.)

With Independence, the *raison d'être* of the administration ought to have changed. It did not. In fact, it became worse. India adopted a Soviet-style system with its licence-permit syndromes. In essence, favours to be distributed by the New Delhi *darbar*; hence, the additional importance of the IAS officer. A prime example of the licence-permit hold is the steel

**W**ith independence the *raison d'être* of the administration became worse... India adopted a Soviet-style system with licence-permit syndromes



(Left) P.N. Haksar: Co-opted from the IFS, became Jaisankar Gandhi's right-hand man during her first stint as prime minister. A powerful bureaucrat who scorned politicians

(Above) L.K. Jaisankar: Lal Bahadur Shastri's Prime Minister did, and in turn babu's clout. A more than a decade

industry. Forget private producers; for them it is a nightmare anyway. Even if a government organisation—say Durgapur Steel Plant—wants to expand its capacity by a million tonnes a year, it has to submit the proposal to Hindustan Steel Ltd, another government agency. From there, it goes to Steel Authority of India Ltd, then to the steel secretary, then to the babus at the Planning Commission, onwards to the Economic Affairs Committee. Ultimately, it will reach the PMO, and wind its way downwards. In the middle, somewhere, finance ministry bureaucrats will step in, claiming mastery—they hold the purse-strings. All this takes months—if not the five-year span of a government. In Japan, the plan would be okayed or negated at a single board meeting.

Another example: Air India says it can finance its aircraft purchases with its own foreign exchange earnings, and handle interest payments on loans in the same way. A quick step, which would ensure that the airline increases its network, with better aircraft, and matches savage competition. But the babus sit fiddling figures and projections till the next century—they have



no clue at all about how to run an airline—blocking what is an obvious step for decades.

All this may have relevance in a pre-Berlin Wall society—the one undisputed aspect of *perestroika* is to rid the system of over-government. But how does one do it here in India, where senior bureaucrats publicly state views such as how one of them, and not an army officer, should be the chief of the army staff. Or that a babu should be a commissioner of police.

Though the bureaucracy is subordinate to the political process—it is supposed to carry out the will of the

politician—it has accumulated so much power over the years that it has become an unstoppable behemoth. Says Syed Shahabuddin, an ex-IFS officer and presently the president of the Insaaf Party: "It's true that we inherited the bureaucracy from the British, but during that period, the politicians were the riders and the bureaucrats the horses. And the rider had complete control over the horse. Today, there has been a reversal of roles. The bureaucracy is the rider and the politician the horse."

But often, as is happening with disturbing frequency, the roles are

merged. Says John S. Lall, a former Indian Civil Service (ICS, a precursor of the IAS) officer: "Fundamentally, in British times, we were responsible to the British government through a clearly defined hierarchy. We were very close to the seat of authority (now it has a disparaging connotation, he adds). But, on the whole, I think the ICS exercised its very considerable authority with a sense of responsibility." This, of course, is an ideal bureaucracy. Says Ahmad, the political scientist: "(German sociologist Max) Weber used to say that bureaucracy is based on rationality

## The making of a babu

*Or, lessons and leisure for lording over*

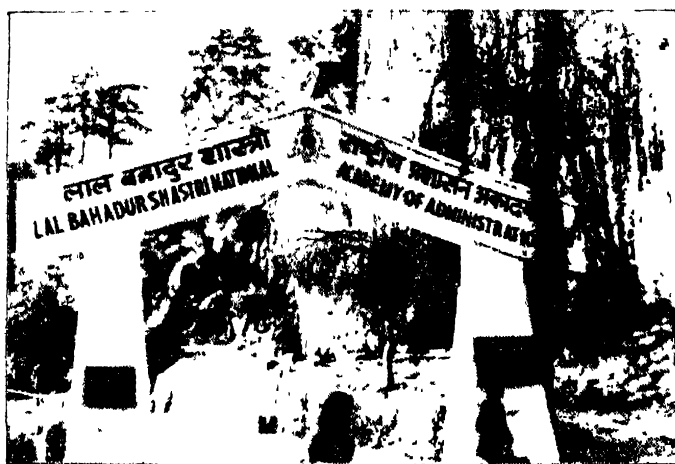
**T**he transition from a virtual non-entity to an all-powerful bureaucrat may seem like an impossibility, but at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie, it takes just 26 weeks of classroom work to turn civil service probationers into power-wielding babus.

The rigours of the Union Public Service Commission examinations—a preliminary objective test, followed by a main examination and personal interviews—over, a select group of around 300 service probationers make their way to the Academy. They are only from the Group A services, the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). The lesser—though increasingly more popular—services, revenue, railways, audit and accounts, among others, train their new officers in establishments scattered across the country (revenue officers, for example, are schooled in Nagpur). The LBSNAA is the place only for the creme de la creme, which, at the preliminary test stage, numbers more than 90,000.

Training of officers at the Academy consists of two district phases, spread over seven months. In stage one, which continues for 16 weeks, the trainees are taught the nuances of government and administration: lessons in the social and political history of India, constitutional law, economic background of the country, *et al.* Special stress is given to law, which possibly explains a bureaucrat's legal aptitude as well as his ability to pen often-incomprehensible, and sometimes ridiculous, rules. (A classic example is the *Administrative Instructions on Departmen-*

*tal Canteens in Government Offices and Industrial Establishments*, 1988 edition, issued by the ministry of personnel. A section in para 1.15 reads: "Policy matters and coordination on canteen matters will be centrally done by the department of personnel & training (director of canteens). This action, in the case of offices/ establishments exempted from the applicability of these orders (as per para 1.4) will be done by the controlling ministries/ departments of those offices/ establishments themselves. no correspondence, excepting central registration of the canteens, shall be addressed directly to the director of canteens by the office/ estts..." This gem is signed by Krishna Singh, joint secretary with the ministry, and is supposed to help "managements in meeting their targets".

Lectures by a team of experts—bureaucrats, parliamentarians, lawyers, among others—seminars and debates are the highlights of phase one training. There are no examinations, therefore, the question of passing or failing does not arise, but, as a lecturer points



**ENTRANCE TO THE ACADEMY:** "It's like extended college life—smoke pot, listen to music...and you even get paid"



That a bureaucrat acts in the interest of the state, in a non-political role." This is precisely where the politician steps in, says Ahmad, and "because of his own insecurities, starts to politicise the bureaucracy—by appointing his own men—which can totally distort the non-political function of the bureaucracy." He names Jalan, the finance secretary, who is "close to (finance minister Madhu) Dandavate and especially to V P Singh." He adds "You may not have an evil intent, but you appoint them because you want your policies to be handled your way, you want someone who will

out, students "are expected to follow the classes attentively". He adds: "Most of those who come here have little or no exposure to what they will be doing later. Without the knowledge we impart, the probationers will be complete disasters in the practical field." Sushil Kumar, an IAS trainee, agrees. "Four months may be a short time," he says, "but the crash course does give one the idea of the things to come."

The real grilling starts with the completion of theoretical lessons. Under the next programme, the ten week-long phase two, probationers—both IAS and IFS—are despatched to their respective states to work under the district collectors or commissioners. This two-week stint, called "Bharat darshan" in Academy jargon, exposes the to-be babus to practical problems in governance. After this, the trainees return to the Academy. They are encouraged to share their experiences, discuss problems they faced and work out solutions. By now, the 'cub' babu has been transformed into a full-fledged administrator—or so Academy authorities claim. "The purpose of the induction programme," says LBSNAA director T. Ugander, "is to expose the boys and girls to ground realities. The 26 weeks do make a lot of difference to the probationers."

But not everyone agrees with the director. Many trainees feel that the induction programme should have been more extensive. Says one: "It is like the net practice on the eve of a Test match. The exercise achieves little beyond building up spirit." Concurs John



**MADHU LIMAYE**, politician: "The triangle between businessmen, bureaucrats and ministers is now a constant in our system"

S. Lall, an ex-Indian Civil service officer who taught probationers from 1947 to 1949 "(These days) the training is very sketchy. They are hardly in the field these days." The logic is that extended hands-on training at the beginning of a bureaucrat's career would make for an officer of a higher calibre (In *The Republic*, says a bureaucrat, Plato mentions that a bureaucrat needs 40 years of various stages of training to become a perfect bureaucrat. "We," he jokes, "could show Plato a thing or two.") But despite this disadvantage, says Lall, there are "exceptional people" in the services.

For many of these exceptional—and not so exceptional—officers, life at the Academy is a whirl of leisure activities. "Look," says a senior bureaucrat in New Delhi, "it's like extended college life and you even get paid while you study. Basically, we used to go for long walks in Mussoorie, maybe smoke pot, listen to music, flirt around. You know what I mean. It still happens." Even rulers need to have fun.

share your views." And so on, from the Cabinet secretary downwards, enveloping the entire bureaucratic network.

"Politicisation is inevitable," says Umashanker, the IIPA director. "It is a reflection of the system. A collector or a district magistrate, for example, is not immune to reality." Simply put, if you do not listen to the politician, you can forget about everything—a plum posting, promotions, the power and the glory and, for a distressingly large number of officers, the money. "Some people are more ambitious than others," says Umashanker. "At the time of Independence," he continues, "there was a clear line between the politician and the bureaucrat. But this divide is not as clear as it was. An ambitious person may see in the political activity a way to advance his position." Says Limaye: "They (the bureaucrats) are dominant through sycophancy." And if they are not, they pay. Former Maharashtra chief minister A. R. Antulay's midnight transfers of unfaithful bureaucrats in 1983 is a prime example. "I will do what I want, when I want with bureaucrats," he said at the time.

But the point really is that even if





ICS officer: "I think the system is bound to be a general dilution in its morality"

the babu gets flak from the politician he endures and, ultimately, wins—the system only grows stronger. Antulay, for example, may have removed bureaucrats, but he replaced them with other bureaucrats: the crutch was ever-present. Mrs Gandhi may have tolerated only sycophants—especially in her later years as Prime Minister—and she may have browbeaten them into submission, but without them, not a single one of her policy initiatives—including the infamous Emergency—could have been effected. And Rajiv acted in the same way. In an interview to *SUNDAY* in end 1988, he admitted as much: "I didn't know people as well as I should have known people as PM, which means that you had to rely on people that you knew better while getting to know other people... Which basically meant a network which introduced acquaintances within the charmed circle. Aiyar, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, I. N. Seshan, Gopi Arora, the list went on. A trusted team, who

may have done more harm than good to Rajiv, as many detractors maintain, but which was nevertheless necessary for governance. V. P. Singh, for his part, may initiate talks on the Punjab and Kashmir issues, but without babus to help work out the modalities, any reconciliation move would be a dead loss from the beginning.

This dependence on babus in modern India came into play early on in the post-Independence years. The ICS

**As the bureaucracy grows in numbers," says Aiyar, "there is bound to be a dilution in its morality"**

officers, who faced nationalist flak when the British were their overlords, continued even after the British left. In fact, they probably became more powerful, as only they knew the ropes of government and were also the only people who could train a new generation of Indian bureaucrats. "Mercifully," says Mani Shankar Aiyar, "Pandit Nehru realised he could not do without the ICS." These officers later assumed high positions in the bureaucracy and many became ambassadors, Governors and vice-chancellors of universities. In fact, for 15 years after Independence, they completely dominated all the top administrative posts in India. And all the while, the institution became stronger.

The big break for bureaucrats came during Lal Bahadur Shastri's stint as Prime Minister. Because of a "lack of confidence", writes Limaye in his book *Cabinet Government In India*, Shastri wanted a strong personal secretariat. He inducted I. K. Jha for the job, who took on increasing responsibility and kept expanding the secretariat—thus expanding the area of control. Shastri's Cabinet secretary, Dharma Vira, was another powerful figure, who frequently side-stepped the foreign service in key issues—he often dictated policy over the Kutch problem with Pakistan, just before the 1965 war.

Indira Gandhi, for her part, brought in P. N. Haksar, a serving IFS officer, as her personal private secretary. Haksar bulldozed his way past ministers and actively participated in politics, orchestrating the 1969 split in the Congress party. He was as contemptuous of bureaucrats, but this ultimately served to increase their clout. If such a person—no matter that he was from the IFS—was so powerful, it rubbed off on the whole service. They may have cowered in front of Haksar, but they would strut around flashing babu power at the rest of the country. This was also the beginning of the wholesale politicisation of the bureaucracy.

And with politicisation, came the ills that politics breeds like a cancer: greed for money and power, a facet which has irrevocably changed the life of the babu. Says Limaye: "The triangle between businessmen, bureaucrats and the political executive (the ministers) is now a constant in our system." The general feeling is that the honest babu is dead. Some attribute it to political pressure, but most



analysts say it has to do with the growth in the number of babus and the broadening of the recruitment base. In the ICS days, barely 10-15 officers were recruited a year, the number had jumped to 100 by the early 1960s, including the IFS. Now, it is around 600 a year, with hardly anyone opting for the IFS. (There is a shift to other central services—customs and income tax, for example, with their allure of a cut, or a ten per cent reward from the captured booty. But the IAS is still the strongest draw.)

"As the bureaucracy grows in numbers," says Aiyar, "there is bound to be a dilution in its morality." Adds Umashanker, "Not all people join the bureaucracy for altruistic reasons." That is precisely the character of the new babus. The bureaucracy is no more the preserve of the genteel public school boy, the idealistic St Stephen's College (called the nursery of the services) graduate who would be in the game for power and a mission to do something for the country. Today's babu is cold, calculating and knows exactly what he wants. Take the case of an IAS topper from, yes, St Stephen's, a few years ago. The height of his intellect in college was going around chasing co-eds with the line "read Pablo Neruda, you'll know all about me." But this person, from an obscure educational background in Bihar, his eyes set on the IAS, said—frequently—he would be in it for the money it would bring him. "There are ways," he would say enigmatically. Or another St Stephen's graduate, who has tried—unsuccessfully—to join the IAS three times. He is trying for a fourth and will not settle for any other profession. "Once you get in," he says, "everything is easy. Power, money, everything."

This leads on to the argument that the cream do not join the services any longer, preferring instead to opt for banking, management, accountancy,



**SYED SHAHABUDDIN, ex-IFS officer, politician: "Today, there is a reversal of roles. The bureaucracy is the rider and the politician the horse"**

advertising. In short anything else. "There are few creative, innovative bureaucrats these days," says Limaye. "The private sector absorbs the professionals." The quality may be affected—though at the top slots no one questions a babu's professional competence, after years of operating in the system they are thoroughbreds—but the organisation is not. It takes punishment and criticism, doles

**"Once you get into the IAS," says a prospective candidate, "everything is easy. Power, money, everything"**

out largesse if it pleases, blocks politicians if it wishes, makes law and money, and always comes out on top. There is that incident when author Khushwant Singh (then an information officer with the government) and Ashok Chandra, later the Comptroller General of India, were chatting in London one evening. Chandra was bitterly complaining about the then high commissioner to UK Krishna Menon's high handedness and rude behaviour and vowed he would get even. Years later, when Singh met Chandra he asked the bureaucrat if he ever got his revenge. Of course, said Chandra, *Saale ko file mein aisa mara!* Says a senior IAS official in New Delhi, lighting up his Dunhill cigarette and taking a sip of his Bloody Mary (it is lunchtime—a break from the rigours of administration). "A bureaucrat always. I repeat always,

**Sudeep Chakravarti/New Delhi with Rajiv Bagchi/New Delhi and Mussoorie**



# The letter bomb

*An angry Devi Lal attacks the Indian Express*

**D**evi Lal is sulking. The whole world seems to have turned against him. Even the *Indian Express*. Till very recently, the deputy prime minister had believed that while political allies might fall out, the newspaper empire of Ramnath Goenka would stand by him, come what may. But here too, he was mistaken. An outwardly injured, but inwardly furious Devi Lal then decided that he too would hit back. He got together a voluminous report (see box) on the *Indian Express'* alleged involvement in a mind-boggling range of illegal practices, and despatched these to Prime Minister V.P. Singh, with a covering letter.

The charges were astonishing. The deputy Prime Minister's main contention was even more incredible. In his letter to V.P. Singh, Lal wrote that he had made enquiries into the forces that are trying to sow seeds of dissension within their party and had concluded that this was part of a conspiracy "to destabilise the National Front government, destroy the Janata Dal and push the country towards chaos." The subsequent portion of Devi Lal's letter was even more remarkable. "This is a part of the imperialist designs backed by some powerful capitalists," he wrote and added that the *Indian Express* and Ramnath Goenka were playing a crucial role in it. The implications of the deputy prime minister's argument were obvious. The Express Group had supported the struggle against the Congress(I) for its



**Devi Lal: "The *Indian Express* is trying to destabilise the government"**

own dark aims, and now were targeting Devi Lal.

"I am not at all surprised that I should be the primary target," the letter read, "because whatever else may happen, as a freedom fighter, I can never be a party to the destabilisation of India." After outlining his noble cause, Devi Lal went on to the central theme of his attack. "When I looked into the matter in greater detail, I discovered Mr Goenka's unsavoury methods. He has himself been guilty of violations of numerous laws including Company Act, FERA, the FSI and Urban Land Ceiling Act Laws, Income Tax, Customs etc. He has also been involved in economic frauds and malpractices. He has used his ownership of the *Indian Express* and our respect of freedom of the press to cover these nefarious activities."

This was sensational stuff. And the canny *kisan* from Haryana was determined to play it to the full.

After submitting the letter and its annexures (a total of over 80 pages of typed matter) to V.P. Singh, he surreptitiously leaked copies of the letter to the Congress(I). From his side, he maintained a studied silence, posing as the ultimate disciplined party soldier, unperturbed in the face of even the most insistent of newsmen. The inevitable happened, when Congress(I) MPs led by Vasant Sathe raised the issue in the Lok Sabha and demanded a debate on the matter. It could have turned out to be a major embarrassment for the *Indian Express* and for V.P. Singh; but for one factor: the deputy prime minister could not match the *Express'* credibility.

Where the government and the people should have jumped, they merely smirked. The Tau was funny, but nobody in their right minds could take him seriously. The *Indian Express* merely shrugged and there was none of the expected public outrage.

**After quietly submitting the letter to V.P. Singh, Devi Lal surreptitiously leaked copies of the letter to the Congress(I)**



**T**here is nothing new in these allegations," remarked S K Kohli, *Indian Express* general manager at New Delhi. "We can hardly react to old charges all over again." Kohli pointed out that as many as 300 cases had been filed against the Express Group during the Rajiv Gandhi regime and every allegation in Devi Lal's 'White Paper on Goenka's Misdeeds' was culled from files prepared during that period. The cases that had some merit in them were pursued by the previous government and the rest were left to rot in the files. "As far as we are concerned, the Government of India has not withdrawn any of the cases framed against us and we have never asked the present government to withdraw any of them," Kohli maintained, adding very correctly that the law must be allowed to take its own course.

The finance ministry, which has been given the job of looking into the allegations by Prime Minister V P Singh, is equally unperturbed. "What is there to remark about Mr Devi Lal's allegations?" countered a finance ministry official. "We have not withdrawn any cases, the courts will deal with them and departmental enquiries will continue. However, the excitement over the exposures is certain to make government officials sitting on the Express cases a little uncomfortable. They will have to wipe the dust off the Express case files and get investigations moving again."

For instance, one of the charges against the Express was that it had not paid Rs 25 lakhs it owed to the customs for newsprint imports. This had allegedly been done with the complicity of the State Trading Corporation (STC) and the then customs collector, Bombay. The truth of the matter was that the customs collector had actually persuaded the Express to pay up Rs 60 lakhs prior to the final calculation of the precise amount due to the customs. This had been done because a number of documents were not available at that time and the final calculations would have taken months. That

particular customs collector was subsequently transferred and the *Indian Express* was thereafter asked to pay another Rs 21 lakhs. All the same, till the publication of Devi Lal's letter, the Express had not paid this amount. Similarly, there are a few other cases against the Express which have not been followed up because of lack of evidence.

All this makes it difficult for the government to ignore even the scores of baseless cases made out against the Express during the Rajiv years. One of V.P. Singh's aides expressed the view that the Express had brought all this upon itself, saying, "It could have criticised Devi Lal but it need not have been so mean about it." He was of course referring to Express editor

mental capacities and notions be entrusted with the affairs of the country?"

**S**hourie had, of course, said much more. Most of all, he had underscored how Devi Lal was not merely undermining the V P Singh government's credibility but was also blackmailing it. "Should the government remain mortgaged to a man, who just to shield his son from the consequences of the latter's criminality, rocks the government every week?" Shourie queried. The question could not but have dismayed Devi Lal's supporters who count on his remaining at the helm of power. Shourie's detractors hold that it was grossly unethical for him to have pub-



**Ramnath Goenka (left) and Arun Shourie: targets of Devi Lal**

Arun Shourie's frontpage report on his bizarre telephonic conversation with Devi Lal.

The *Indian Express* story of 29 March, recounting conversations between Devi Lal and Arun Shourie, had perhaps damaged the deputy prime minister's reputation even more than the appointment of his son Om Prakash Chautala as Haryana chief minister or the rigging of the Meham poll. For, it showed him not merely as a bully and a boor, but also a man not quite in control of either himself or the situation. Earlier, he had merely been a rustic strongman forcing his son on the Haryana throne and rigging elections. He was seen as a leader who wielded raw power, controlling MPs and MLAs all over the Hindi belt states. After the 29 March story, Devi Lal remained powerful but he had become an embarrassment. The Express editor's article raised the ineluctable question "Should a man with such

lished his private conversations with Devi Lal—and especially to have highlighted the deputy prime minister's penchant for peppering his conversation with swear words.

Devi Lal had several other reasons to be piqued. The deputy prime minister sees himself as a man who has stood by the *Indian Express* during a period when it had come under unrelenting attack from the Rajiv Gandhi government. It is even rumoured that the Haryana leader had helped break the strike at the Express. It is believed that he had offered Ramnath Goenka land in Haryana to set up an *Indian Express* edition there. Those were the days of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition in Haryana and the *Indian Express* at that time was the Tau's friend and ally. Relations soured only after Devi Lal decided to support Chautala's bid for the chief ministership. This was seen as a betrayal by the BJP and also by a large section of people within the



# Grave allegations

*What are the charges against Ramnath Goenka?*

**O**n the face of it, the charges are impressive. Deputy prime minister Devi Lal seems to have laboured hard to collect an incredible quantity of evidence (compressed into 80-odd typewritten pages) to depict the Indian Express Group as an evil empire that has consistently and successfully broken numerous laws. Considerable work has obviously gone into preparing the remarkable document Devi Lal's 'White Paper' on the *Express* sins contains ten sections with sensational titles 'Bank Breaking Job', 'No Fear of FERA or Customs', 'The Towering Scandal', 'The Great Newsprint Swindle', etc. The titles as well as the style of presentation are, however, much more exaggerated than the evidence. Apart from a few well-established cases like the one on the Bombay Express Towers, the evidence in most cases is flimsy, the assertions and innuendos more gripping.

## Racketeering in newsprint

The first three papers are devoted to exposing *Indian Express*' alleged racketeering in newsprint. The first section begins with the dramatic declaration that the *Express* empire is built on a "foundation of corruption" and goes on to detail how the group is involved in influencing officials and agencies to exaggerate its demand for government supplied newsprint with a view to selling the excess in the blackmarket and inflating its expenditure statements.

Devi Lal claims that official investigators have unearthed "bogus bills" from non-existent parties in Calcutta and Delhi to show a higher level of newsprint consumption than is really the case. Enquiries made as late as in January 1989 have allegedly confirmed that a number of fictitious firms were paid a total of Rs 5.2 cores during 1987-88 for newsprint purchase. But efforts to locate these firms failed.

The document also claimed that the *Express* Group gets glazed newsprint from the government quota for some of its publications like *Screen* but uses the ordinary variety for these magazines. The glazed newsprint is allegedly sold in the blackmarket.

These notes however fail to mention that there is nothing new about newsprint racketeering charges and investigations by government agencies during the last years of the Rajiv Gandhi regime had failed to pin down Ramnath Goenka in this matter.

## The Express Towers case

This is an old case where *Indian Express* had been indicted for violating Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) FSI norms (relating to the permissible limits of constructing floorspace) and for unauthorised use of constructed floorspace. The *Express* has lost this case in the Supreme Court but has appealed again.

## FERA and customs violations

The first of these allegations relate to the *Indian Express* returning a shipment of machinery spareparts imported from France worth Rs 1.58 lakhs. Apparently, the *Express* re-shipped the spares but did not return the foreign exchange which it had paid for this deal to the RBI within six months.

Moreover after raiding the *Express* premises in Bombay on 1 September 1987, the DRI is supposed to have unearthed two instances of customs duty violations. The contention of the DRI was that the *Express* had paid lower duties on two consignments (worth sterling 8647 and sterling 4309) by bribing customs officials.

In yet another case, the customs and the State Trading Corporation is supposed to have allowed *Express* to get away without paying Rs 25 lakhs in customs duties on im-

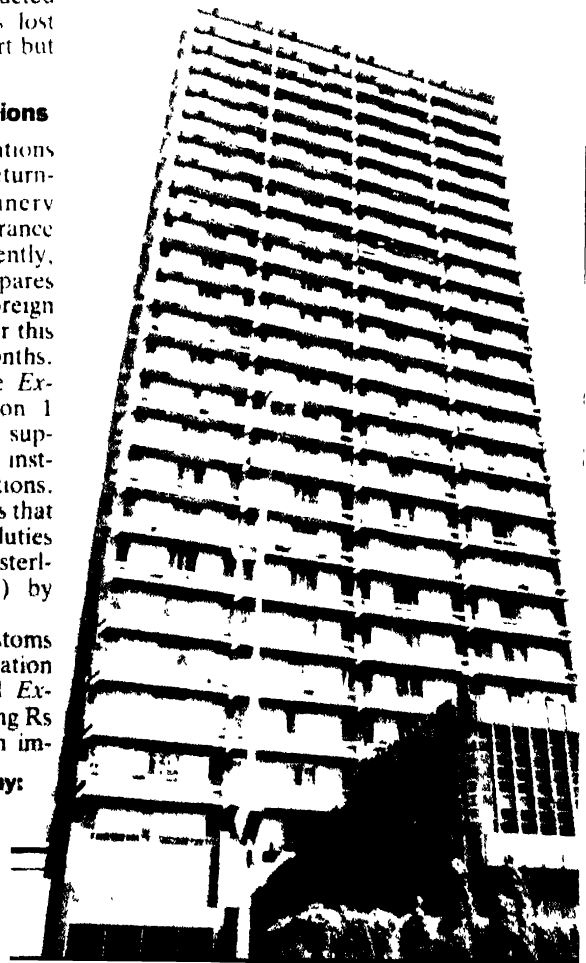
## The Express Towers in Bombay: violating FSI norms

ported newsprint. Customs officials deny this and say that *Express* had never refused to pay the sum.

## Inflating maintenance costs

One of Devi Lal's papers claims that "*Express* wizards have evolved a specific strategy of debiting completely false (maintenance) expenses through one contractor, who collects his payments under three different names." Lakhs of rupees are allegedly siphoned off and to account for these expenses false bills are obtained from the contractor.

S. Gurumurthy, the *Express* financial advisor, and Vivek Khaitan, the group's executive director, come in for considerable criticism. Strangely, however, at no point does Devi Lal provide even circumstantial evidence of their involvement in this alleged malpractice. The "damning evidence" in this case is an old report prepared by the group's chartered accountants and a few bills. Nothing points to any irregularity being committed. Only the fact that the *Express* management does not in-





vite open tenders for routine work like repairing airconditioners and furniture is somehow seen as being extremely malafide.

### Income-tax violations

Early in 1989, the income-tax authorities raided the offices of the Indian Express Group and its associates in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta. According to the Devi Lal papers, the *Express* had been tipped off about the raids and had removed two truckloads of documents to cover up its nefarious operations.

However, another paper points out that income-tax proceedings had been initiated against the *Express* and its owner Ramnath Goenka. In May 1989, the then Union minister of state for finance (revenue) Ajit Panja had disclosed that the *Express* was being prosecuted for concealment of income. Panja said that the *Express* had been assessed for income of Rs 45.33 lakhs in 1986-87 as against nil income returned (shown) by the group. Goenka was personally assessed for Rs 19 lakhs in 1985-86 as against Rs 28,950 returned by him. Finance ministry sources say that these cases have not been dropped and are continuing.

### Misusing bank finance

This charge contends that *Indian Express*, Bombay, borrowed funds from the State Bank of India to purchase Bombay Dyeing and Orkay Mills shares. Devi Lal says that the bank funds were actually meant for purchasing newsprint and the *Express* therefore flouted RBI guidelines. These allegations, too, are not sufficiently backed with evidence. The deputy PM argues that much more will emerge if the transactions are investigated. "Such are the labyrinthine methods adopted by Goenka in his financial dealings that to unravel them, the authorities will have to use all the resources at their command, not to speak of a large degree of circumspection and persistence."

Ironically, the authorities did use all their resources during the last years of the Rajiv regime to book the *Express*. They did not quite succeed. Perhaps, because Goenka was too clever for them or perhaps because there was no case.

Janata Dal. Devi Lal managed to win that one but after Meham his credibility was finished. His antics, and the unspoken threat that he could destabilise the V.P. Singh regime, turned him into a liability.

As the *Indian Express* started to report on the goings-on in Meham, Devi Lal's supporters began suspecting that the BJP, through the *Express*, was trying to undermine him. The rift widened and a desperate Devi Lal took to calling Shourie and Goenka in the hope of browbeating them. The *Express*, instead of calling a truce, stepped up its offensive. A number of

his haste to discredit the *Express*, he could not prepare a particularly devastating case against it. Government sources disclose that he got his information from the wrong man. B.V. Kumar, former director of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) Kumar incidentally was the bureaucrat who, during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, was entrusted with the job of collecting evidence against Ramnath Goenka and the *Indian Express*. His brief was to deal with all cases, not just customs and excise ones, connected with the newspaper tycoon. In this endeavour, he was



DRI officials going through papers at the *Express* office: they found nothing

V.P. Singh's supporters felt this was a bad move. For, the fight between Devi Lal and the *Indian Express* caused friction even in the upper echelons of the Janata Dal. V.P. Singh can't take any strong action against Devi Lal as the latter still openly boasts of holding the key to the continued existence of several Janata Dal chief ministers. This is not an empty boast. He is still a power to contend with and V.P. Singh knows it. At the same time, the Prime Minister realises only too well how much of an embarrassment his deputy has become. Singh would perhaps have preferred an easy solution such as keeping Devi Lal out of the news. But the *Express* will not oblige and there is nothing the Prime Minister can do for the moment but assuage his deputy's bruised ego.

Devi Lal nevertheless erred in not planning his moves correctly. In

helped not inconsiderably by the Ambanis, who had been targets of the *Express*' criticism.

Though Kumar managed to lay his hands on numerous ends of a complex skein, he never managed to unravel it. Instead he extrapolated and argued that there was much in the *Express*' empire that needed further probing. Kumar's perseverance might have got him in favour with the Ambanis but the present government isn't too impressed. It has transferred him to an inconsequential post after learning that he still had his dossiers to feed *Express*-barbers. In retrospect, it seems both Kumar and Devi Lal forgot the moral of the story: if you want to get into a slanging match, make sure your credibility is better than that of your opponent. •

**Indranil Banerjee/New Delhi**



# Bring in the loyalists

*V.P. Singh inducts a new team of junior ministers*

**P** rime Minister V P Singh has scraped the bottom of the Janata Dal barrel to stuff his ministry with as many loyalists as he could. Not that he had much of a choice. He desperately needed more ministers and his Janata Dal followers were clamouring for reward. Not too many of them were competent though. Most of them were not even capable of standing up in Parliament to debate. Then there was the additional complication caused by leaders like Devi Lal, Ajit Singh and Chandra Shekhar, all of whom wanted their supporters to be accommodated in the Union Cabinet. In the end, V P Singh did what most politicians would have done: he compromised and in the process formed a large but mediocre ministry.

Where V P Singh did succeed admirably was in making sure that his team contained a majority loyal to him. In ensuring this, the Prime Minister waived aside all other considerations. He did not care to assuage the feelings of a number of senior leaders



**V.P. Singh: consolidating his position**

who were waiting in the wings to get into the Cabinet. Neither did he bother to make his ministry regionally representative. When newsmen asked him why a senior leader like Ashoke Sen from West Bengal was not accommodated, Singh replied tersely that he could not induct people who had lost elections. The Prime Minister had made one thing clear for the moment, he was more interested in

consolidating his own position within the party.

Today, roughly one out of every four Janata Dal MPs is a minister. And each minister controls or has links with at least four other party MPs. This means that V P Singh can effectively command the 143-member Janata Dal Parliamentary Party. And greater control over the party will automatically give the Prime Minister more power to deal with pressures from other senior Dal leaders and from the National Front allies, including the left parties and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

It is no coincidence that the overwhelming majority of the 18 new faces represent just three states: six from Uttar Pradesh, five from Bihar and four from Orissa. The three remaining ministers are from Gujarat, Kerala and Rajasthan. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa constitute the real base of the Janata Dal—these are the states which have returned the largest number of Dal MPs and which are also ruled by JD governments. In every other northern state, the Janata

## THE NEW FACES

**Chimanbhai Mehta**, Gujarat

**Portfolio:** human resource development

**Camp:** V P Singh (ex-Jan Morcha)

**Bhajan Behra**, Orissa

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** petroleum & chemicals

**Camp:** V P Singh (ex-Jan Morcha)

**Janeswar Misra**, Uttar Pradesh

**Rank:** minister of state holding independent charge

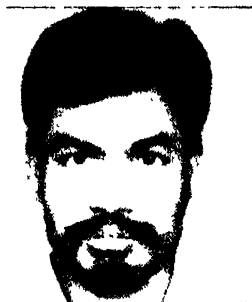
**Portfolio:** communications

**Camp:** Devi Lal

**Rashid Masood**, Uttar Pradesh

**Rank:** minister of state holding independent charge

**Portfolio:** health and family



**Bhakta Charan Das**

welfare

**Camp:** Ajit Singh

**Jagdeep Dhankar**, Rajasthan

**Rank:** deputy minister

**Portfolio:** parliamentary affairs

**Camp:** Devi Lal

**Usha Singh**, Bihar

**Rank:** deputy minister



**Ajay Singh**

**Portfolio:** women and child development in the welfare ministry

**Camp:** V P Singh

**Anil Shastri**, Uttar Pradesh

**Rank:** deputy minister

**Portfolio:** finance

**Camp:** V P Singh

**Bhakta Charan Das**, Orissa



**Ram Pujan Patel**

**Rank:** deputy minister

**Portfolio:** youth affairs and sports in human resource development ministry

**Camp:** Chandra Shekhar/V P Singh

**Bhagey Govardhan**, Orissa

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** planning and



Dal is in competition with the BJP. The Prime Minister has, in a sense, also rewarded the states which have overwhelmingly supported the Janata Dal and clearly intends to strengthen his party's organisation in these states.

The Cabinet expansion cannot but have piqued a number of senior leaders. They include Yashwant Sinha, Kalvan Singh Kalvi, Ashoke Sen, Raj Mangal Pandey, Samarendra Kundu, V C Shukla, Purushottam Kaushik, Jaipal Reddy, Abdul Samad and a host of others. Many of them had not only hoped to be inducted into the ministry but also expected to be given Cabinet positions. Their disappointment could turn them into dissidents. And the Prime Minister is aware of it. To stave off the prospect of immediate dissension, he shrewdly announced that his ministry would be expanded again and some ministers could be promoted if they did a good job. According to Janata Dal insiders, V P Singh has told some of his colleagues that the next expansion would take place sometime in early June this year.

In the meanwhile, the Prime Minister will aim at consolidating his position within the party and further clip the wings of rivals like Chandra Shekhar—a leader who has not risen in open revolt simply because he knows that such a course of action would not exactly be judicious at the moment. As long as V P Singh

## According to Janata Dal insiders, V.P. Singh has told some of his colleagues that the next Cabinet expansion would take place sometime in early June this year

appears to be in command, Chandra Shekhar's supporters will not be prepared to voice dissidence. It is estimated that Chandra Shekhar controls a maximum of 43 MPs (the ones who attended his luncheon party a fortnight after the formation of the National Front government) but of these only seven or eight are considered to be blindly loyal to the ageing 'Young Turk'. Now Singh is trying to lure even these MPs into his camp.

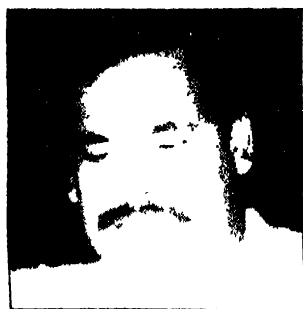
Three members from Chandra Shekhar's group have been given a berth in the ministry: Subodh Kant Sahay, Harkishore Singh and Bhakta Charan Das. However, all these three MPs had also been cultivating the Prime Minister.

The latest reshuffle also has indirectly cut a few existing ministers to size. K P Unnikrishnan, the Congress(S) MP from Kerala is one

clear loser. As minister in charge of the communications portfolio, he had launched a crusade against the C-Dot chief, Sam Pitroda, and was fast becoming a controversial figure himself. His exit from the communications ministry will not merely come as a relief to Pitroda and his men but also to a large section of the National Front leaders who do not favour the idea of being projected as a vindictive lot.

The Telugu Desam nominee, P Upendra, has also been humbled somewhat. Although no one has been appointed to interfere in his ministry of information and broadcasting, his importance as the sole parliamentary affairs minister has been reduced with the appointment of two others to look after this portfolio—Satyapal Malik (minister of state) and Jagdeep Dhankar (deputy minister). A lot of Upendra's clout derived from his position as parliamentary affairs minister since this job also required interaction with the NF government's two powerful props, the BJP and the left parties. And, with Nilamoni Routray, a Cabinet-ranking minister, being shifted to environment and forests, Menaka Gandhi's clout and high-profile image is bound to suffer. Routray was expected to be dropped and his transfer suggests that he has been retained merely to fight it out with Menaka. •

**Indranil Banerjee/New Delhi with Rajiv Shukla**



**Srikant Jena**

programme implementation

**Camp:** unattached

**Nitish Kumar, Bihar**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** agriculture and cooperatives

**Camp:** Devi Lal/Sharad Yadav

**Srikant Jena, Orissa**

**Rank:** minister of state



**Satyapal Malik**

**Portfolio:** small scale, agro and rural industries in industry ministry

**Camp:** Biju Patnaik

**Ajay Singh, Uttar Pradesh**

**Rank:** deputy minister

**Portfolio:** railways

**Camp:** Ajit Singh

**Harkishore Singh, Bihar**



**Chimanbhai Mehta**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** external affairs

**Camp:** Chandra Shekhar/V P Singh

**Upendranath Verma, Bihar**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** rural development

**Camp:** Ajit Singh

**Subodh Kant Sahay,**

**Bihar**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** home

**Camp:** Chandra Shekhar/V P Singh

**Satyapal Malik, Uttar Pradesh**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** parliamentary affairs

**Camp:** V P Singh (ex Jan Morcha)

**Ram Pujan Patel, Uttar Pradesh**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** not allocated

**Camp:** V P Singh

**Arangil Sreedharan Kerala**

**Rank:** minister of state

**Portfolio:** not allocated

**Camp:** Chandra Shekhar/V P Singh



# Democracy and deadlock

*The India-Nepal tangle may take longer to sort out than most people believe*

**I**f the Indian press is to be believed, then it is all over—even the shouting. During the past fortnight, successive reports in the country's newspapers and magazines have acclaimed the 'return of democracy' to Nepal, cheered the establishment of popular rule, and exulted in the defeat of the monarchic or authoritarian order.

At the same time, there has been a spate of analytical articles foreseeing a new chapter in India-Nepal relations. Gone, it is suggested, are those rocky, turbulent days of the Rana-Birendra era. With democracy, the diplomatic impasse will be broken, the misunderstandings ironed out and good neighbourliness restored. But has democracy really arrived in the tiny Himalayan kingdom? Will relations between India and Nepal be better than ever before? A dispassionate appraisal of these questions suggests that the answers are somewhat more complex than made out by a large section of the Indian media.

There is no denying, of course, that the pro-democracy movement has wrung substantial and impressive concessions. In just two months—during which a spate of agitations rocked Nepal—it has forced King Birendra (on 8 April) to lift the 29-year-old ban on political parties and promise to introduce a multi-party system. And then, only one week later, pressured the monarch into dismissing the existing government and replacing it with one headed and packed by the multi-partyists.

But, all the same, are these changes enough to announce the return of democracy, to claim the King is politically finished, to imply the battle is over? The Nepalese, at any rate, don't think so. Last week, the Nepali Congress' supreme leader, Ganesh Man Singh, told SUNDAY: "We have only opened a door. But we haven't quite walked through it." (See 'Democra-

cy'—issue dated 22–29 April.)

The cautiousness of Man Singh and other leaders of the Nepali Congress and the seven communist party United Left Front (ULF) (which launched the movement together) is understandable. For in the race towards a multi-party system, the most important hurdle still remains to be crossed: constitutional reform. The Congress and the ULF have demanded that the Constitution be radically reworked and that the King (who is presently all-powerful) be relegated to the status of a constitutional monarch. It is here that the multi-partyists are likely to encounter the greatest resistance. For it is difficult to imagine that the King will give up his considerable powers under the Constitution without so much as a murmur. Says the ULF's Man Mohan Adhikari: "When it comes to constitutional reform, we expect a tough fight."

**I**f the assumption that democracy has been fully restored is somewhat premature, then the belief that India-Nepal relations will inevitably improve is rather simplistic. Those who predict a cosy, trouble-free rela-

**Most Nepalese believe that the India-Nepal treaty is unequal and was forced by New Delhi on a Rana government that was under political pressure**



**Bhattarai (left) and Man Singh (extreme right): calling for a return to the status quo ante which prevailed in March 1989 in India-Nepal relations**

tionship draw comfort from the attitude of the Nepali Congress, which has traditionally been better disposed towards India than the Palace. The recent remarks made by the Congress Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai and its supreme leader Ganesh Man Singh would appear to bear this out. Bhattarai has spoken of the ties between the two nations as "deep and binding on each other" and Man Singh has said that it is time that Nepal gave up the Palace's favourite pastime of "playing China against India and vice-versa".

Both leaders have sought an early settlement of the dispute over the trade and transit treaties, which the Ravi Gandhi government allowed to lapse last year after it became convinced that Nepal was being insensitive to India's security concerns. (Earlier, King Birendra's government had purchased a consignment of arms from China, an acquisition which heightened the fear that Nepal was drifting dangerously towards its northern neighbour.) And Man Singh has explicitly called for a return to the *status quo ante* which prevailed in March 1989, before the treaties lapsed.





It is not hard to understand why the Congress is so keen on reverting to the previous arrangement. Apart from the fact that the expiry of the treaties has put the Nepalese economy on hold and caused considerable discomfort and hardship to the people, an understanding with India in this respect will constitute a political victory for the party. It will then be able to boast of having resolved a problem which it has always maintained was of the Palace's making.

However, India, which has consistently maintained that any agreement on trade and transit must be linked to an understanding about its security concerns, is unlikely to drop the demand for a "comprehensive treaty." If this happens, it would mean sorting out the problems about the controversial 1950 India-Nepal treaty, which, among other things, commits both countries to respond to a security threat faced by the other and lays down certain conditions for the import of arms by Nepal. Most Nepalese believe that the treaty is unequal and was forced by New Delhi on a Rana government that was under political pressure. Although, unlike some of the left parties, the Nepali Congress has not been hostile towards the treaty, Prime Minister Bhattarai said

last week that he was in favour of having it revised to suit "the present changed situation." "Changes have become necessary as the treaty has been in operation for a long time," he claimed.

It is here that the India-Nepal relationship could come under strain. For, even if Bhattarai is not very serious about wanting the treaty revised and is willing to enter into a comprehensive agreement which accommodates what New Delhi sees as its legitimate security concerns, his UFI partners in the coalition government are unlikely to accept this. In other words, it is not improbable that differences between the Nepali Congress and the UFI may break out when Kathmandu tries to iron out its problems with New Delhi. Says S D. Muni-

Jawaharlal Nehru University and an expert on Nepal affairs, "There is no doubt that India is a divisive factor among the various parties in the kingdom. The problems that may arise regarding the India-Nepal relationship concerns not only New Delhi but the longevity of the present government."

It seems as though the Nepali Congress is not altogether insensitive about the problems that could arise from attempting to sort out the India question immediately. Says a high-ranking South Block official, "The government does not want an agreement with India before getting the King into making constitutional reforms."

It is also doubtful whether New Delhi wants to rush the matter. Over the past two months—during which the pro-democracy agitation won widespread international support—the Indian foreign ministry chose to refrain from openly backing the multi-partyists. At the same time, South Block was careful about not doing anything which would be interpreted as support for the King and his *panchayat* government.

The best instance of this even-handed (if cynical) policy is the manner in which New Delhi had conducted the negotiations to 'resolve'

the problems about trade, transit and security early this month. When the Indian foreign secretary visited Kathmandu along with a team of officials on 1 April to submit a draft of proposals, it was feared in some quarters that New Delhi may sell the pro-democracy movement out in order to strike a deal with the King. However, in retrospect, it appears as though India never wanted an agreement at that stage and intentionally submitted proposals that were unacceptable to the Nepalese. Says a government official in Kathmandu, "They put forward suggestions that were absurdly tough. It is possible that they never wanted us to agree to them."

If this is true, then South Block had played its cards—at least in a narrow diplomatic sense—very cleverly. For, the game then was to make a pretence of settling the differences with the King (to have refused to do so would have alienated the Palace even further) and at the same time ensure that the negotiations failed (an agreement would have lost India the sympathy of the multi-partyists altogether).

The flip side of what must be characterised as a diplomatic victory is the effect of India's studied neutrality on the multi-partyists. The foreign office had clearly believed that the movement, if it ever succeeded, would take far longer in doing so and was influenced by the fact that pro-democracy agitations in Nepal have floundered much too often in the past. While New Delhi has not alienated the multi-partyists by any stretch of imagination, it is difficult to resist considering the gains if India had refrained from what JNU's Muni calls the business as usual approach and backed the multi-partyists to the hilt. Says Muni, "Imagine there was no Chandra Shekhar (who has stridently advocated the multi-partyist cause) in the Janata Dal. What kind of impression would New Delhi have made then? Clearly, we have been somewhat lucky."

All in all, it appears as if the India-Nepal tangle will take a while to sort out. Its resolution will depend on developments in the political situation in Nepal over the next few months. For the moment, the governments at Kathmandu and New Delhi may prefer to hold out till a full-fledged democracy is established in Nepal. Until then, it could be back to the old game of wait and watch. ●

**Mukund Padmanabhan / Kathmandu and New Delhi**



# Trouble in paradise

*The appointment of Jagmohan as the Governor of Kashmir has only made matters worse*



Remember the old song "Pale hands I held beside the Shalimar"? Well, the only thing those pale hands are now cradling is a Kalashnikov cocked at an angry angle. And when

the wind wafts through the golden *chinars* the ardent declaration, "Kashmir, only Kashmir", it is not the Mughal *Badshah* Jahangir whispering in his dying breath of his favourite earthly paradise, but Benazir announcing where she intends to come this long, hot summer!

How has it come to this? This is the same Valley—and the same people—who turned to us in 1947 to save them from Jinnah's murderous marauders.

This is the same Valley—and the same people—who in 1965 put paid to Operation Gibraltar, the fatuous brainchild of that armchair aggressor, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto ("armchair" because he never went to any front himself, only sent others to certain death in the pursuit of his vainglorious ambitions). It was Bhutto who infiltrated hundreds of saboteurs into the Valley, bristling with arms, money and propaganda material, to stir the villagers of the Valley into raising the banner of *inquilab*. And it was the very object of these threats and blandishments—the villagers of the Valley—who identified every manjack of these *agents provocateurs*, picked them up, and handed them over to the security forces.

It is upon this Valley—and this people—that the Governor and his administration have launched a war of attrition. For there is nothing sophisticated or selective about their hunt to flush out the terrorists. Everyone in the Valley—man, woman or child, of every faith and every political persuasion—is indiscriminately the target of continuous curfews, of draconian dragnet, and swingeing security operations. The administration seems animated by the quite mistaken belief

that if it smothers, smashes and starves the Valley into submission, the people will yield up the terrorists in their midst and, exhausted by the severity of the security onslaught, return like lambs to the strait and narrow.

God knows, Farooq made his mistakes. And there was a gathering deterioration in the political situation in the Valley between the swearing-in of the National Conference (NC)-coalition government in March 1987 and the enthronement in December 1989 as home minister of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the refugee from Anantnag.

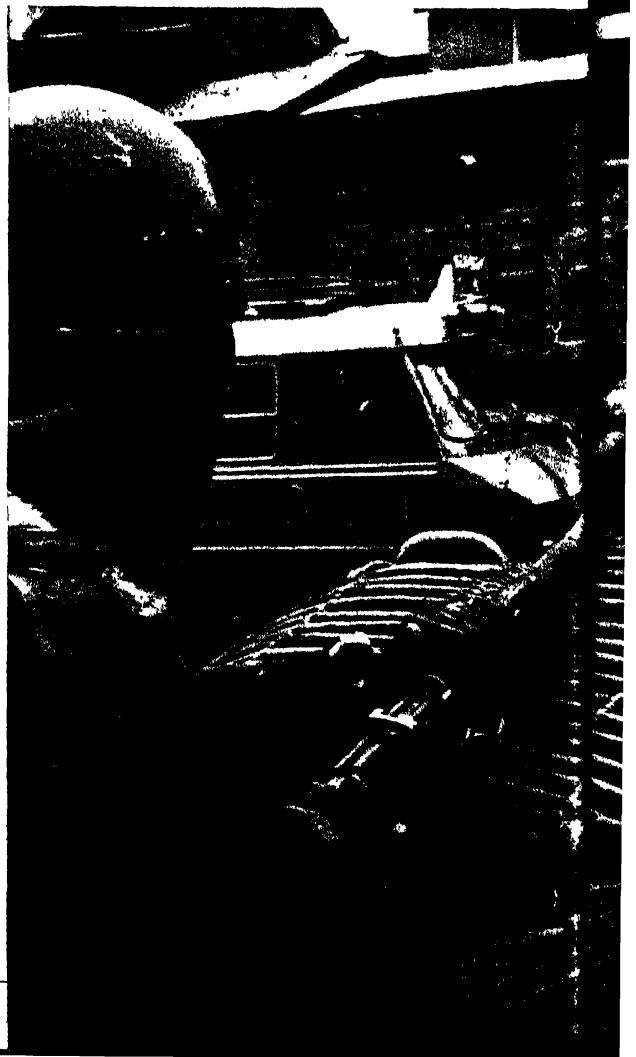
But the slow etiolation of the Farooq years, an etiolation at once containable and reversible (and, moreover, not without precedent), just cannot be compared to the turmoil in which Kashmir has been plunged since the new Union government took office in Delhi, and especially after it sent Governor Jagmohan to the Valley.

For the turmoil, post-December 1989, is the outcome of a ghastly misreading by the National Front (NF) government—and the motivated malice of its "outside supporter", the BJP—of the causes of the tension in the Valley. This is startlingly evident in the agenda paper prepared by the Union home ministry for the National Integration Council meeting held on the 11 April. The paper may be the Mufti's but the pen is clearly the BJP's.

For the agenda paper identifies "communalism" as the basic *cause* (and not an incidental *consequence*) of all that has gone wrong in Kashmir. The focus in the paper is kept firmly on

the exodus of the Hindu minority from the Valley, glossing over (or is it deliberately downgrading?) the hordes of other Kashmiris, including thousands upon thousands of Muslims, who have fled from both terrorism and the tender ministrations of the new dispensation. Whatever the defects of the Farooq years, all these Kashmiris—Hindu, Muslim or whatever—stayed in the Valley from

**CRPF men keep vigil in a sensitive area:** *The administration seems animated by the mistaken belief that if it smothers, smashes and starves the Valley into submission, the people will yield up the terrorists in their midst.*





March 1987 to November 1989, but, since December 1989, have been left with small alternative but to take to their heels

There is little or no food in Srinagar. Infants are going without milk. Life-saving drugs are virtually unavailable. Since 15 December—that is, for much of the last four months—curfew has been almost continuous, lifted only for a few brief hours early on cold, wintry mornings and reimposed before the commencement of the normal working day. Inevitably, the economy has collapsed. With no one able to go out to work, manufacturing activity is at a standstill, whether it be of the exquisite crafts for which the Vale is justly renowned or in the larger factories. Shops open only to be quickly shuttered again. The banking system has folded up. The Post Office neither despatches nor delivers letters. Telephones are on the blink. Neither cargo nor passengers can be booked. The export trade has dried up. And no tourists—the holidaymakers on whom

the livelihood of lakhs of Kashmiris depends—are anywhere in sight.

It's not "communalism" but *all* these factors—*plus* the terrorists emboldened by the ransom they successfully extracted for the release of Rubaiya—that has led to the present state of affairs. The NF—as is it's wont—may attempt to pass the buck to Farooq, but it is an attempt that just won't wash with the people who actually live in the Valley. They have known troubles before, but the trauma to which they are now being subjected is without precedent. The exodus of Kashmiris from the Valley—whether of Hindus, Muslims or others—is *not* because Kashmiris of different faiths, who have lived together in harmony for hundreds of years, are suddenly unable to stand each other, but because ordinary living—life, sweet life—has been rendered virtually impossible by the new authorities now in charge.

**G**overnor Jagmohan is an articulate man. When the all-party delegation visited Srinagar last month, he clearly set out his two-pronged strategy for Kashmir.

First, administrative: since the administration "has not broken down but been taken over", he intends to "dismantle and rebuild it" from scratch. Second, political: since the National Conference and the Congress have forfeited their "representative" character, he intends to create and generate "new" political forces in the Valley.

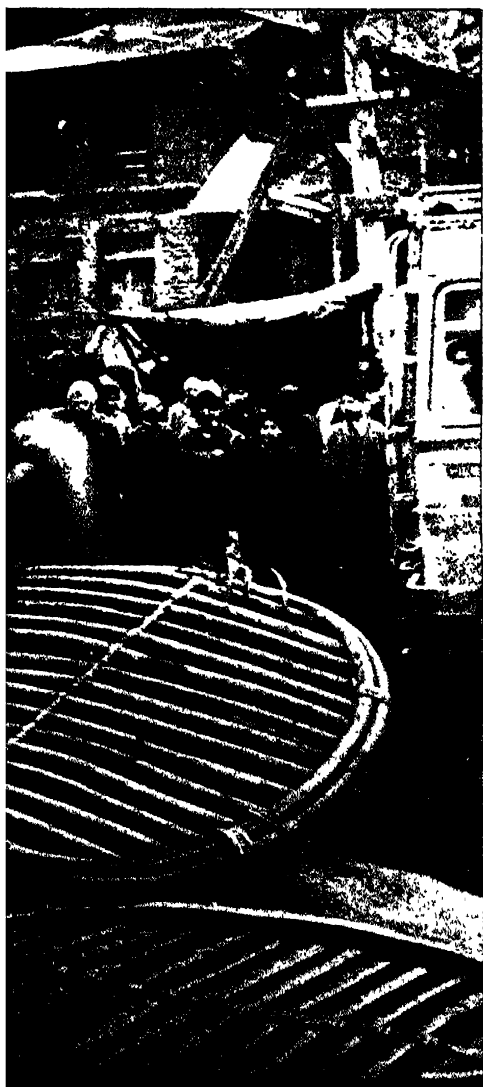
Questioned about the extent of infiltration of the administrative machinery, the Governor declined to cite a figure, whether in absolute numbers or percentages or proportions. He insisted only on his favoured expression "takeover" (*sic*), as they say in our business). Of the thousands of Kashmiri officials—Muslim, Hindu and other—working in his administration, he had identified about 30 for rustication from government. Since then, another score or so have been removed. But the perception of a "takeover, not a breakdown" has meant that no Kashmiri official—Muslim, Hindu or other—is really fully trusted. Those under suspicion are suspended or dismissed (which is okay). The others under general suspicion—meaning everybody else—are marginalised, deprived of authority and robbed of responsibility (which is

*not* okay). Vacancies cannot be filled: we were told that in response to an advertisement for recruiting hundreds of constables, only about a dozen applications were received and a bare two or three turned up for the interview. True, this is not because the local youth are not in search of work (on the contrary, they are desperately in need of employment), but because they dare not show their willingness to become the agents of alien governance. There were no such inhibitions even in the worst days of the Farooq regime. How on earth, in the circumstances, is the Governor going to "dismantle and rebuild" his administration? Without Kashmiris? Without Muslims?

The "dismantling and rebuilding" of the administration in Kashmir is a chimera. It cannot be done, it must not even be attempted. At best, the bad may be weeded out and the general administrative ethos revamped. But because the concept of "dismantling and rebuilding" is bruited about from on high, and because it emanates primarily from the Governor himself, every Kashmiri is made to feel a second-class citizen in his own state. This never happened under Farooq—or, indeed, under any of his predecessors. It is the inevitable consequence of the BJP finding the right agent to bypass the vacuous central government and begin at the beginning, the building of the Hindu Rashtra from the crown of India, top down!

The Governor's political prescription—the generation of "new" (and presumably patriotic) political forces in the Valley to the detriment, indeed suppression, of the existing nationalist political forces—is equally bizarre. Jagmohan's appointment led to the immediate resignation of the Farooq government and, therefore, to the snapping of nationalist political links to the people of the Valley. Farooq's resignation was not an unexpected occurrence: he had made it clear that if Jagmohan was appointed Governor, he would be unable to continue as chief minister.

Jagmohan's dislike of Farooq is, however, so visceral that he was not content merely with forcing the resignation of the good doctor and suspending the Assembly in which Farooq enjoyed a majority of 71 out of 78 members. He insisted on pursuing his personal vendetta to the consummation he so devoutly desired: the total elimination of Farooq from the





VIBHOR



## THE GREAT ART BAZAAR

The event: an art auction. The place: the Taj poolside. Hosts for the evening: Dilip Dé and wife Shobha.

Bombay's art bazaar shifted to the Taj Bombay, to auction a Subhash Awchat painting and raise funds for the renovation of the Jehangir Art Gallery. In attendance were the rich, the powerful, and

the mandatory art connoisseurs. While the Birlas, the Goenkas and the Lakhanpals rubbed shoulders with such members of the artist community as Jehangir Sabavala, Lalita Lajmi and Lakshman Shreshta, the host and hostess mingled with their guests, dressed in traditional Maharashtrian costumes that would do Maganlal Dresswalla

Dilip Dé (second from left) at the art auction: all for a good cause

proud. The industrialists made their obligatory bids for the painting, which finally went to Kumarmangalam Birla for Rs 75,000.

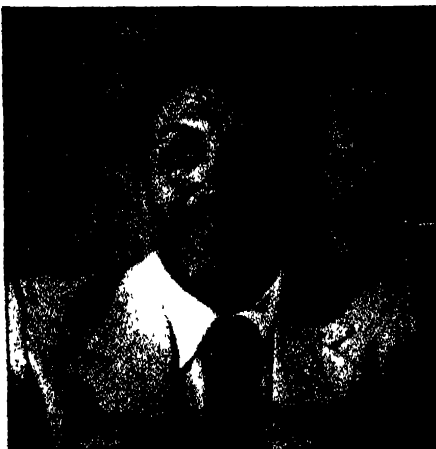
Good deed for the night done, the invitees got down to serious business: tucking into the *desi* Maharashtrian food and *videshi* booze, leavened with some distinctive Bombay gossip.

## OVER AND OUT

Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic had become synonymous over the years. But come May and all that will change, with the Parsi conductor retiring from his job. Succeeding him will be East German conductor and political activist, Kurt Masur.

Zubin Mehta: goodbye to the New York Philharmonic

GOPAL SHETTY



Mehta, probably the most famous Parsi outside of India, has had a long innings with the baton. But insists that he will pursue "other artistic endeavours" after retiring from the New York Philharmonic.

What these might be, he refuses to tell.

## NEEDLING THE PAKISTANIS

Every Sunday morning

he's on television screens throughout the country, flexing his bejewelled biceps at the Pandavas and insisting in heavily Sanskritised Hindi that he will not give his cousins a "needle-point's equivalent of land".

And now Puneet Issar, the Duryodhana



Puneet Issar at a Save Kashmir Morcha meeting: doing a Duryodhana

of B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharat*, has taken to enunciating the same dialogue at political rallies. Leading the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) organised Save Kashmir Morcha, Issar thundered: "*Mai is desh ki sui ki nok ke barabar bhi zameen Pakistan ko nahi doonga.* (I will not give Pakistan Indian territory equivalent to a needle-point.)"

That's all very well. But surely Issar couldn't have forgotten that despite all his rhetoric, Duryodhana was on the wrong side of the political fence.



## BRING ON THE BUFFALOES!

He's taking his role as agriculture minister a little too seriously. Even to the extent of taking his farming activities right into the precincts of his President Estate residence.

Deputy prime minister Devi Lal recently informed the Lok Sabha that he was going to uproot the grass on the lawns of his bungalow and plant a nursery of agricultural plants in its place. In a month or so the beds would be flourishing and all members of the House were welcome to come to his place and take plants for



Devi Lal: Tau of the soil

their gardens.

This little confidence came in response to a question relating to the Dal's efforts to improve the lot of the Indian farmer. None of the MPs

could quite figure out what the connection was—but then, one supposes, nor could the Tau. One flummoxed member, after much scratching of head at this

rejoinder, yelled out: "Saah, bhains mat rakha na vahan. (Sir, don't keep buffaloes there)"

And no, we don't know how that one connects, either

## THE IMRAN KHAN STORY

He got along famously with the late General Zia-ul Haq. He was at Oxford with Benazir Bhutto, and has dinner with her occasionally now that she is Pakistan's Prime Minister. And there really

Imran Khan: journeying down the Indus



can't be anyone more qualified than Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan to write a book on the recent political history of the country.

Okay, maybe that's pushing it, but Khan has gone ahead and written *Indus Journey: A Personal View Of Pakistan*, anyway. The book, said to be part autobiographical and part political, is priced at well over Rs 500, and given the level of interest that anything connected with Imran Khan generates, is bound to sell well.

Even if there isn't much gossip about Benazir's student days.

DURGAPRASAD

## NO DUMB KITTY

She's come a long way from playing the dumb Kitty to you-are-a-genius-sir Karamchand. And with her one-woman plays earning encomiums from critics, Sushmita Mukherjee has established herself as an actress (as distinct from television starlet).

Her two shows, *Ek Akeli* and *Ek Subah*, based on serious comedies of Dario Fo and Franca Rame, have been adapted for Indian audiences by Atul Tandon. *Ek Subah*, as the name suggests, is about the way a typical day begins for a working woman, with Sushmita going about her household

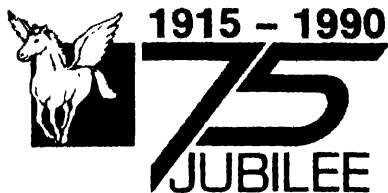


Sushmita Mukherjee and Pankaj Kapoor in *Karamchand*: you've come a long way, Kitty

chores robot-like, while her husband lazes in bed. *Ek Akeli* tells the story of a woman confined to the house by her husband, and her battle to retain her sanity.

Beginning with Bombay, Mukherjee has toured all over the country with her show. And played to rave notices on all occasions. ●





## Portrait of a 75 year old



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**A**t one level, they are relics of our glorious past. On the other, mute testimonials of the carelessness of the modern Indian, or more precisely, the neglect of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), entrusted with the onerous responsibility of protecting important historical monuments of the country. The state of such medieval structures as the Barah Khamba, Atgah Khan's tomb and Zafar Mahal (all in Delhi) seems to suggest that the ASI prefers to concentrate its energies on the most obvious tourist attractions in the capital, excluding the lesser-known monuments, even though they may be on the 'protected list'.

It is the ASI's responsibility to look after the well-being of major historical buildings in India. And to facilitate its task, the country has been divided into 16 circles. In Delhi circle, 165 monuments and sites are notified as 'protected' by the organisation. Unfortunately, not all of them are really protected; some have to bear with encroachment, and even at times, defacement, by the people who choose to live in them.

Barah Khamba in the Nizamuddin area of New Delhi is a case in point. A tomb, built in the 15th century AD, it comprises a domed hall with a verandah around it. The hall is set on arches formed by 12 sets of pillars—hence the name Barah Khamba. Corresponding to the arches of the hall, there are arched openings in the verandah, over the four corners of which lie low domes, with faint traces left of the paintings which once decorated them. All in all, a splendid example of Islamic architecture.

Only now, it doubles as a residence for homeless Muslim families. These



## Medieval relics, modern times

*And some protected monuments that aren't quite so protected*

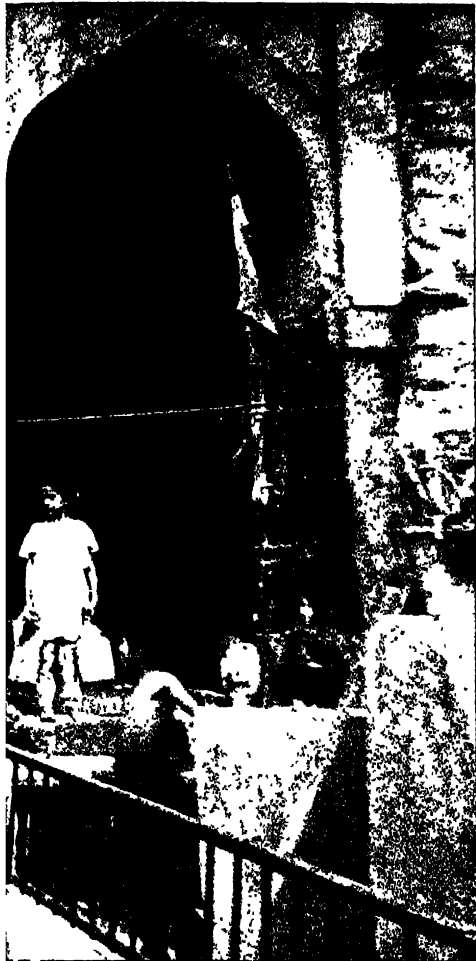
people, 40-odd in all, can barely eke out a living plying rickshaws or selling *kabadi* as they do, and certainly can't afford to build their own houses. So, they have settled in the domed hall of the Barah Khamba for the last 15 years or so now, and will probably remain in residence for another 15.

Explains Mohammad Shabir, one of the residents. "We have no place to go. If the government provides us with alternate accommodation, we are quite willing to move out of Barah Khamba. But unless we have another place to live, how can we leave this

one?" But Shabir needn't fear for his home; no one from either the ASI, the Delhi administration or the police has come to bother him or any of the other trespassers for the last five years or so. He and his fellow-inmates can continue to huddle together in this monument, covering the arches with gunny bags during the monsoons and lighting up fires within the dome in the winter.

**N**ot far from Barah Khamba lies Atgah Khan's tomb, dating back to the Mughal era, and situated be-





**Barah Khamba: shelter for the homeless**

Behind the famous *dargah* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Nizamuddin. Heavy scents of flower and incense waft around Atgah Khan's tomb, but unlike the *dargah* which it borders, it doesn't have a constant stream of supplicants. Instead it has a Muslim family in residence outside it, the members of which use the walls of the tomb to hang their clothes out to dry and the courtyard as a playground

One family, more enterprising than the others obviously, has taken over the basement of the tomb, and is not doing too badly by its rentless quarters if the television set on one of the shelves is anything to go by. Question the residents and they claim that they find nothing odd about calling the basement of an ASI-protected monument home. "This is where we have lived," says one of them, "and this is where we will continue to stay"

Another monument that provides temporary accommodation to the

homeless is Zafar Mahal in Mehrauli, Delhi. Named after Bahadur Shah Zafar II, the Mughal Emperor who ruled between 1847—1857, the structure, made of red sandstone relieved with marble, stands 50 feet high and is 11 feet nine inches wide. While the facade of Zafar Mahal, with a three-storied gate, projecting windows and arcades on the south and east, is still impressive, the inside lies in ruins. The backyard of the palace is used as a garbage dump by the locals and neighbourhood children play in its precincts throughout the day. At night, it becomes a refuge for beggars and other destitutes, with drinking binges within its boundary walls being far from unknown.

The boards set up by the ASI, informing the public that these are protected monuments and warning trespassers

about prosecution stand mocked by the residents of these places, who have made themselves at home here

**N**ot that the Archaeological Survey doesn't have a case. All that ASI got from the culture ministry by way of an annual allocation (for 1989-90) was Rs 1.5 crores. Out of this, the organisation spent Rs 60 lakhs on the preservation of monuments, the rest going towards payment of salaries and other expenditure. Small wonder then, that the ASI fails to protect every structure it is officially meant to.

Perhaps the paltry nature of the resources at the ASI's command can best be understood if we study a comparative figure: the total allocation for the city of Delhi in 1989-90 was Rs 620 crores. But figures don't tell the entire story, either. Says an ASI official, on the condition of anonymity "It is not so much a shortage of funds as the lack of sufficient technical staff which prevents the ASI from doing as much work as it would like to"

While the ASI is hemmed in by such restraints, the authorities continue to



**Atgah Khan's tomb (above): neglected; Zafar Mahal: serves as a playground**



allocate money to schemes oriented towards the Western tourist. Among them is the project to light up the prominent historical monuments of Delhi, with a view to drawing attention to them. In the first phase six monuments have already been illuminated—Red Fort, Delhi Gate, Feroz Shah Kotla, Purana Quila, Sher Shah Gate and the Qutub Minar.

The ASI has been consulted on this, and as per its requirements, special care has been taken to ensure that the monuments sustain no damage. Illumination of the Qutub Minar, for instance, was done without laying cables on the Minar. The lighting of the Qutub Minar entailed an expenditure of Rs 4.5 lakhs, that of Sher Shah Gate cost Rs 2.50 lakhs, Delhi Gate amounted to Rs 1.20 lakhs, and Red Fort accounted for Rs 1 lakh.

Surely a quarter of this expense would go a long way towards resettling the residents of Barah Khamba, Atgah Khan's tomb and Zafar Mahal, and safeguarding these 'protected' monuments. ●

**Anjali Sawhney/New Delhi**



# Dial M for Murder

*Did the Ananda Margis plot to kill Jyoti Basu and other Marxist leaders?*

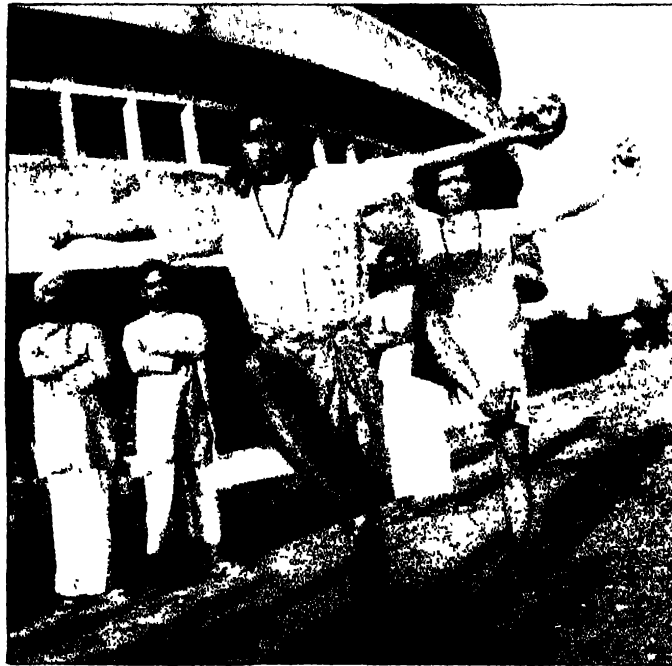
**M**ore often than not, the most heinous of plots are revealed accidentally. In the early hours of 15 April, a Border Security Force (BSF) patrol party apprehended two youths at Ajnala, some 20 kms from the Indo-Pak border in Punjab. There was really nothing unusual about the arrests: ever since trouble broke out in Punjab, the border areas of the state had become a hotbed of terrorists activity and arrests were a common enough phenomenon.

In this case, however, apprehended youths, Suresh Kumar and Ravinder Singh Yadav, had nothing to do with the Punjab militants. Interrogations revealed that they were members of the religio-political organisation, the Ananda

Marg. What is perhaps more disturbing is that both Kumar and Yadav testified that they were smuggling arms from Pakistan into West Bengal and their mission was to eliminate some top Marxist leaders of the country.

The next day, S.S. Bisht, additional inspector general of the BSF, convened a press conference in Amritsar to announce that a huge cache of arms was recovered from the two arrested persons—four automatic pistols of 32 bore, seven others of .30 bore, 24 magazines for the pistols and over 340 assorted cartridges. He also clarified that Kumar and Yadav, both residents of Uttar Pradesh, were assigned the task of collecting arms from Pakistan by one Acharya Mahaviranand, chief of Manab Mukti, a front organisation of the Ananda Marg. What is more, the two youths apparently told their interrogators that the Margis had hatched a plot to murder several CPI(M) leaders—mostly in West Bengal and Bihar.

The revelation shocked the Left



Ananda Margis performing the tandav nritya: at the centre of a controversy

Front government in West Bengal. A red alert was sounded throughout the state and security measures for all Marxist leaders beefed up. Chief minister Jyoti Basu himself asked the state's director general of police, B.K. Basu, to send a team of intelligence officials to Amritsar to interrogate the arrested persons. And, all district

Jyoti Basu: high on the hitlist?



magistrates were asked to keep a vigil on the activities of the Ananda Margis.

Intelligence sources also revealed that the Ananda Marg has reportedly prepared a hit list which includes names like Jyoti Basu, Ambarish Mukherjee, the state's environment minister who also happens to be an MLA from Purulia, and others. According to senior IB officials, the Marg also trained its cadres to carry out hit and run operations.

Aware perhaps that the Marg threat has to be tackled both administratively and politically, the state CPI(M) leadership has geared up party activities down to the panchayat level. The chairman of the Left Front, Sailen Dasgupta, demanded that the

Centre should immediately raid all Marg set-ups in the country. He also instructed party bosses in the districts to launch a campaign against the Margis. "The Ananda Marg is a terrorist organisation. To combat them, we have to build up public opinion against the outfit," said a senior CPI(M) leader.

The arrest of the two youths near Amritsar and their revelations have once again brought the Ananda Marg on to the centre-stage of a bitter controversy. The issue was raised in the Lok Sabha and the West Bengal Assembly, where angry members demanded action against the Margis. Mantreswarananda Avadoot, the public relations secretary of the Marg, however, thinks that the entire episode is just another ploy to discredit the organisation. "We have no connection whatsoever with those arrested. And the Ananda Marg has no links with Manab Mukti," he said.

But at the moment, the avadoot's arguments have very few takers. ●

Barun Ghosh/Calcutta



COMPANIES

# Winner takes all

*Dhirubhai Ambani could be the real victor of the L&T tangle*

**D**hirubhai Ambani's exit from Larsen & Toubro (L&T) was first sniffed out by the stock exchange, the most reactive index to real—and often, imagined—events. An hour before noon on 19 April, L&T share prices dropped sharply by Rs 20 to Rs 65, an indication that someone was selling off the shares. Stock market insiders say it was Dhirubhai, who sold around 1.5 lakh L&T shares, only to move in and quickly pick up Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) shares to boost his position in his flagship company. Now that he had lost the shareholding war with the financial institutions (see *SUNDAY 15–21 April*), there was no need to hold on to his L&T shares anymore.

Ambani had actually resigned the day before, though the world only came to know about it a day later, when it was officially announced at an L&T board meeting. Dhirubhai simply sent in a two-line resignation letter to the company he had taken over a year-and-a-half ago. The company forwarded the letter to N.L. Shinkar, chairman of the Life Insurance Corp. of India (LIC), which had been spearheading the V.P. Singh regime's move to stall the canny Ambani. LIC, claiming shareholding clout in tandem with other financial institutions (FIs), had insisted on an L&T extraordinary general meeting (EGM) to oust Dhirubhai. It even procured an order from the Bombay High Court to push Ambani and his sons Mukesh and Anil to declare their shareholding in L&T. This they did,

saying they held 25 per cent of the equity, as against 37 per cent held by the institutions. Clearly, the Ambanis had lost the share scrimmage. Dhirubhai resigned as chairman, and his son Mukesh as vice-chairman of L&T. D.N. Ghosh, former State Bank of India chief, is the officiating chairman. Says LIC managing director M.G. Diwan: "We have reason to be happy. We (the FIs) now have five people on the (L&T) board—the future will tell who has won or lost." Diwan refused to acknowledge that it is a stalemate. "Hasn't Dhirubhai stepped down?" he asks.

Dhirubhai may have stepped down, but it is certainly not the end of the L&T saga (See box *Countdown to the ouster*). In what is clearly a compromise the Ambanis still have a substantial presence on the board. Mukesh, Anil and Reliance nominee M.L. Bhakta are still directors on the board, and he Ambanis reserve the right to appoint a fourth director. Moreover, in a move that only served to strengthen the



**Dhirubhai Ambani**

compromise theory, LIC withdrew its demand for an EGM. Anil, echoing Diwan's words, told journalists on the same day: "Only time will answer your questions about who won or lost." When a government official says something like that, it sounds like a cliché. But when an Ambani picks up the same thread, it takes on a different connotation altogether—not signifying defeat, but the reality of a comeback.

**I**t looks like business as usual. What was the muscle-power display by the FIs all about, asked corporate watchers. What happened to their original demand for the ouster of four

Ambani representatives from the board? Most businessmen gathered at an Indo American Society dinner a day after the resignations maintained that it was outright victory for the Ambanis. Says journalist Maneck Davar, who exposed the Reliance-BoB Fiscal share transfer scam which resulted in the Ambanis taking over L&T: "This was an unnecessary compromise on the part of the government when it had all the aces

**V.P. Singh: no compromise? Ram Jethmalani: subdued**





There was no way the Ambanis could have won a proxy war, the government even had the upper hand in the case of the (Rs 820 crore L&T) mega issues." He continues. "The mega issue could have been stayed because three to four clauses in the

issue have not been met. For example, the whole contract between L&T and RPL (Reliance Petrochemicals Ltd, which was pledged a suppliers credit from L&T issue funds) has not been finalised. So why did the government give in?" Adds Davar. "I won't say it's

a sell-out, but the government's credibility as far as the bureaucrats are concerned is at stake."

On the other hand, lawyer Ram Jethmalani who last year acted as counsel for a petition seeking to dismiss the L&T issue, is curiously subdued. "The public mischief that the Ambanis did has been undone," he says, "and they should not be allowed to reap the benefits of this mischief. Ambanis did a wise thing by neutralising the government's venom." S. Gurumurthy, a lawyer with *Indian Express* and a long-time Ambani biter was reduced to quoting Chinese philosophy. Said he. "Supreme excellence consists in breaking all the enemy's resistance without fighting... what the institutions achieved in L&T is a victory without a fight. A mere threat (of an EGM) worked."

But these statements all seem a little empty. Actually, they acknowledge the Ambanis' battle-wise temperament than a somewhat shaky Raja's ire. What everyone is keeping very quiet about is the possibility that the Ambanis, as usual, worked wonders behind the scenes. As soon as the news of Dhirubhai's resignation broke, rumours were flying all over the country about how Dhirubhai's pampering of Chandra Shekhar, the Tau and assorted stalwarts in the Centre's equation had helped pull off their defence. The Shiv Sena, the fast-emerging Hindu fundamentalist organisation, which fought the recent Assembly elections in Maharashtra with an electoral alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party, publicly backed the Ambanis. As Jethmalani says, Dhirubhai neutralised the Raja's venom, so "why should the government be vindictive now?" And Gurumurthy, despite claims to victory, was in New Delhi a couple of days after the resignation announcement, requesting an appointment to Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande's durbar, an indication of nerves. When last heard, his requests for a *darshan* were being denied.

Expectedly, finance minister Madhu Dandavate was besieged with questions about the settlement wherever he went. In Bombay last week, he came up with a relatively weak counterpoint. "We have compromised in order not to disturb the capital market. The Ambanis also compromised because no businessman will take a short-term view of things. Let's see how things shape up. The new chairman will have to set things right." And

## Countdown to the ouster

*The end-game in a battle of nerves*

**29 March:** Financial institutions, including Life Insurance Corp. (LIC), General Insurance Corp and Unit Trust of India meet to discuss the L&T issue. The decision: LIC should ask L&T to call an extraordinary general meeting (EGM).

**2 April:** LIC serves notice on L&T to call an EGM, in a bid to remove chairman Dhirubhai Ambani, Mukesh Ambani, Anil Ambani and M.L. Bhakta from the L&T board and install their representatives as directors.

**3 April:** Mukesh Ambani announces in New Delhi that they are exploring ways of challenging the notice, including court action.

**4 April:** LIC and L&T gear up for a proxy war. The Bombay Stock Exchange places L&T shares on spot delivery, speculative purchase and sale not allowed. L&T shares had moved up from Rs 84 to Rs 126, earlier, spurred on by both institutions and Ambanis buying up to beef up their respective positions.

**12 April:** LIC appoints two more directors on the L&T board to secure majority approval for the EGM at the next board meeting, tearing institutions may be outnumbered.

**13 April:** Controversy over LIC solicitors Suresh and Cyril Shroff being directors on the board of Ambani firms.

**14 April:** News breaks that the Ambanis are talking with the government for a solution. Ambanis insist that Dhirubhai be retained on the board. L&T decides to have a board meeting to discuss the EGM notice. Speculation about the Ambanis giving in for a long-drawn

court battle.

**16 April:** In a surprise move, LIC goes to the Bombay High Court for directions to L&T to furnish the company's shareholding pattern, accounts, etc. which it claimed the Ambanis were refusing to give.

**18 April:** L&T go to court to get the order modified, asking till 21 April to furnish details. Meanwhile, LIC solicitors resign from the Ambani companies. Ambanis approach finance minister Madhu Dandavate with a peace plan, willing to sacrifice three seats on the L&T board, but insist that Dhirubhai stays on. Formula accepted, but on the government's terms. Dhirubhai sends in his resignation letter. His son Mukesh resigns as second-in-command. Letters are forwarded to the LIC chairman. He calls his directors around 6 pm and says there will be a meeting of the LIC board the next day at 10.30 am.

**19 April:** Dhirubhai's resignation placed before LIC board. A two hour discussion, following which the LIC chairman contacts L&T company secretary. LIC then sends two letters to L&T. One informing the company that the EGM request has been withdrawn, and the other saying that D.N. Ghosh, former State Bank of India chief, would be appointed L&T's chairman. Ghosh reportedly agreed after some persuasion.

L&T board meeting chaired by U.V. Rao, chief executive in Dhirubhai's absence. But the Ambanis are not out, just Dhirubhai. They wrangle to retain four of their nominees on the board. Rumours of some Cabinet ministers helping along the Reliance cause.



when asked specifically about the L&T's suppliers credit of Rs 620 crores to RPL, the minister was even vaguer "The new board will take a view on this," said Dandavate "If things are still wrong, then we will cross the bridges when the time comes." As non-committal as one can be

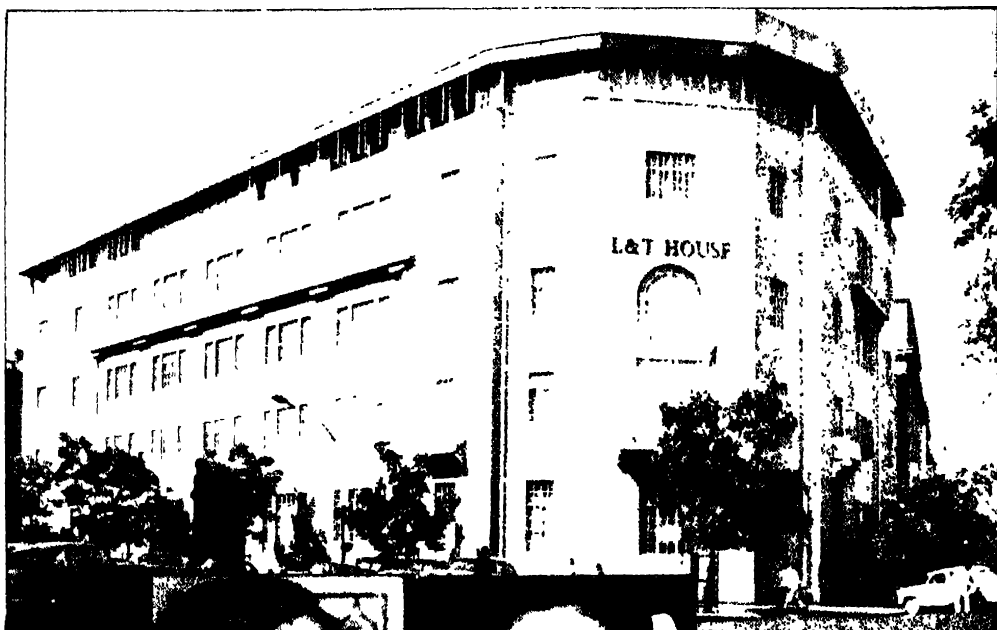
Besides the supplier's credit issue, there is also the problem of L&T being saddled with Rs 76 crores worth of RIL shares. It could affect the company's bottomline as their value has now dropped to Rs 32 crores. The State Bank of India has advised a revaluation of L&T assets. And if the suppliers credit is not backed by a guarantee, then L&T will be in for severe losses if RPL does not materialise. Says Deepak Raja, who runs Bombay-based Strategic Communications, and is a credit risk and business policy analyst "L&T was one of the companies in decay and was ripe for a takeover when the Ambanis came in. It was a combination of Dhurubhar's fast-growth entrepreneurship and L&T's corporate culture. One has yet to know whether the Ambanis are finally a good thing for L&T." But he adds "The Ambanis have shown a lot of maturity by giving in the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship (of L&T). Their taking a soft line on the confrontation augurs well. Both the institutions and the Ambanis have a huge stake in the company and neither can really afford to make it (L&T) sick."

**T**his is perhaps the most even-handed point of view, but it still tilts towards tacit admiration of the Ambanis. With reason. Their propaganda offensive against the government for two weeks, running up to the settlement, was unmatched. They fired the law back at the government, claiming LIC's move was arbitrary. The 27th and the 36th report of the Committee on Public Undertakings on the nomination of directors by FIs makes this evident. For instance, on

the issue of proportional representation on the board of assisted companies, then banking secretary (currently finance secretary) Bimal Jalan said "As a general rule, if the institutions are satisfied with the performance of the company, then it is not necessary to appoint more than two

With the Ambani offensive matching the governments, there was no way out but with a compromise

A suggestion a senior V.P. Singh aide in the finance ministry vehemently denies "We have not compromised or made a deal with the Ambanis," he stresses. As far as the ministry is con-



**The L&T headquarters: centre of the storm: (inset) Mukesh and Anil Ambani: still on the L&T board**

directors." In L&T, the FIs wanted five directors, and not once had they complained about the working of the company. In fact, they had not complained about anything at all. Besides, the 26th report makes it very clear that in companies in which they have less than 50 per cent shareholding, FIs cannot ask for proportional representation on the board. In L&T, they hold 37 per cent. As the Ambanis

pointed out, in companies such as Tata Steel, TELCO, ITC Ltd, Associated Cement Companies and Mahindra & Mahindra, where FIs hold between 36 and 47 per cent, institutional nominees held just two seats on the respective boards. In L&T's case, they wanted five. This, said the Ambani machine, amounted to a witch-hunt.

cerned, they are quite resolute about completely removing the Ambanis from L&T. The appointment of Ghosh as company chairman is cited as a clear pointer to the way the ministry intends to proceed, and the running of the company will be effectively removed from the Ambani influence. The aide says that after the resale of L&T shares to BoB Fiscal, the merchant banking arm of Bank of Baroda, the Ambanis had lost the shareholding battle and cannot ever dream of defeating the FIs in a show of strength. "We have proved to industry," says a senior finance ministry official, "that we are not going to settle scores through arm-twisting. At the same time, we are also making it clear that we will not allow individuals to subvert the system."

The ministry will soon announce several measures to make the operations of financial institutions and share purchases more "open." The ministry





is preparing a "takeover code" which will lay down stringent conditions, a major provision being that all share purchases in excess of two per cent of a company's equity will have to be disclosed. FIs will be made more accountable and secret share transfers will be banned. They may also be asked to publicise major share deals in newspapers. "We want to clean up the system, we want to ensure that a backdoor takeover like that of L&T by the Ambanis is never possible in the future," says the official. The Ambanis, he stresses, will be made the example.



S. Gurumurthy

**"Supreme excellence consists in breaking all the enemy's resistance without fighting... what the institutions achieved in L&T is a victory without a fight"**

Fine, but the L&T compromise negates a lot of that single-minded bluster. As a Bombay-based military historian, who declines to be identified, says, Dhirubhai's encircling of the government is a lot like Carthaginian general Hannibal's strategy in the battle of Cannae. With a small guerrilla force, Hannibal allowed the centre of his army to crumble, drawing in his Roman adversaries, and then launched a pincer attack on both flanks. And routed the Romans. Only, Dhirubhai would do well not to get overconfident, the way Hannibal did. The general, pumped up by his victory, attempted a fool-hardy assault on Rome, crossing the Alps, and not much remained of his army as a result. To Dhirubhai's credit, however, no one has ever called him a fool. •

**Oiga Tellis/Bombay with Indranil Banerjee/New Delhi**

## INTERVIEW

# "We are not unaware of the need for significant improvement"

*West Bengal finance minister Asim Dasgupta on the state's economy, Haldia and Bakreshwar*

*The Rs 3,000 crore Haldia petrochemicals project, Ambanis setting up a Rs 200 crore polyester filament yarn unit in Bankura, a G P Birla group-promoted Rs 700 crore steel plant in Malda. In the past few months, West Bengal has been the focus of industrial activity of a sort unknown in the state for decades. At the centre of this activity are the state's chief minister, Jyoti Basu, and his right-hand man and economic policy wunderkind, finance minister Asim Dasgupta. The recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate, who accompanies Basu on almost all official visits and for negotiations, agreed to talk to SUNDAY on various issues. Excerpts from an exclusive interview.*

**SUNDAY:** Everyone is talking of an industrial resurgence in West Bengal. How do you envisage it?

**Asim Dasgupta:** This industrial resurgence better be a matter of facts rather than of speculation. If you go back to the late Fifties, the index (for industrial production, with a base of 100) would have a value of 123-125, it then dipped and fell to 104 in the early Seventies, then went up all the way to 130 in 1986 and is now expected to touch 140 in 1989.

What we need to look at is the reason for this fluctuation. Without really going into details—by now well-known—one must keep in mind that freight equalisation as a policy was adopted by the central government in the late Fifties. This resulted in not only robbing West Bengal but also the rest of the eastern region of its natural locational advantages in relation to crucial inputs such as iron and steel etc.

Secondly, the credit-deposit ratios of commercial banks fell below 50 per cent as against around 80 per cent for

comparable industrial states.

Thirdly, in the sphere of direct central investment it has been a story of long neglect. The facts are all well known—petrochemicals and electronics, the sectors for which we have been asking for central investment, have been consistently denied any investment. However, in the last few months there have been some positive signs and there is some indication of this so-called resurgence. Of the three constraints that I mentioned earlier, the first, freight equalisation, discussion is taking place with the Centre with full mutual understanding of the problems on both sides. This has never happened before. The credit deposit ratio has increased by five per cent in recent months and with the anticipated participation of financial institutions (FI) in the Haldia (petrochemicals) project, the role of FIs will become increasingly positive in the near future.

I mentioned earlier the share of West Bengal in central investments had fallen from about 12 per cent in the early Seventies to six per cent in recent years. This, while the share in corresponding states moved in the other direction. You may recall our chief minister (Jyoti Basu) had consistently demanded central investment in the sphere of electronics. A concrete proposal for setting up a (Rs 150 crore) telecommunications equipment factory in the joint sector, (promoted by) Indian Telephone Industries and the West Bengal Electronics Industries Development Corporation has emerged. This will have a two fold development—the setting up of the mother complex as well as linking the mother unit with small scale units in the state.

**Q:** In a sense Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd (HPL) is a symbol of this so-called resurgence and yet, there was a great





**West Bengal finance minister Asim Dasgupta**

deal of procrastination regarding this project.

**A:** The story of Haldia is well known. It is a story of denial for more than a decade. Although some (sort of) foundation stone-laying ceremony was held a few days before the last election, the effective clearance and real Central support has been obtained only after the new government came to power in Delhi four months ago.

One thing must be cleared. From the very beginning the state government has been proposing that the project be conceived as an integrated one, that is, connecting up the mother naphtha cracker complex with downstream projects, currently ten in number. The people of West Bengal will never forget the fact that even after a delay of about nine years when the project was estimated to cost around Rs 1,328 crores with a capacity to produce 1.39 lakh tonnes of ethylene, when it was tested to be viable by IDBI (Industrial Development Bank of India), even then the Centre's decision regarding clearance was delayed. Now for reasons of escalation and other technical considerations the cost has gone up to Rs 3,000 crores and the revised capacity is three lakh tonnes of ethylene production per year. The decision was taken to have Tata Tea as the co-promoter for the project. It has been decided that this will be a joint sector project with the government of West Bengal holding through WBIDC (West Bengal Industrial Development

Corp.) as a majority partner 26 per cent of the equity, Tata Tea and associates 24.99 per cent of the equity, the rest to be held by financial institutions and the public.

Consequently, the MOU (memorandum of understanding) was signed on 23 February and after that there was the question of restructuring the board. On the 5th of April, R.P. Goenka handed back the shares and we are very grateful for the full cooperation that he has extended to us.

**Q:** At what stage did the question of reviewing the capacity arise?

**A:** Minimum economic size has never been an issue. In fact, we had worked out that economic viability of the project was feasible even at

**“Our workers in the state are still the most socially responsible group in the country and given a challenge they can rise to it”**

1.39 lakh tonne capacity. Even then, in early 1988, the chief minister had written to the Government of India that if necessary, we are prepared to increase the size to three lakh tonnes.

**Q:** What will be the size of the restructured HPL board? Who are the members?

**A:** We have roughly decided that the total strength of the board will be 13. The reconstruction will take place in two phases. In the first phase there will be four representatives—the chief secretary (of West Bengal) Tarun Dutta as chairman of the board, the secretary, department of commerce and industry, the secretary, department

of finance, and the managing director of WBIDC. We have inducted (Tata Tea chairman) Mr Darbari Seth as a director of the board and requested him to be deputy chairman. Mr Seth has accepted our proposal. The second phase of the reconstruction will be implemented in the next six months. It is expected that Dr S. Ganguli, now at ACC (Associated Cement Companies) will join the board as executive vice-chairman and S.P. Bhattacharya of Tata Chemicals will join as managing director of the company.

**Q:** There is a great deal of speculation about the allocation of downstream projects. Some of the names are known—R.P. Goenka, the Mittals, G.P. Goenka. Who is getting what?

**A:** In some downstream projects the industrialists mentioned will be involved in due course. The areas are yet to be worked out. Since there is a foreign exchange problem at the national level, we have had to take care of that by planning to export a few items generated by the first generation downstream units which would earn necessary foreign exchange for the project. This may be required for a small fraction of naphtha production. For the second generation downstream projects, our plan is to have the units set up in the small-scale sector. This will be employment-intensive, creating jobs for 1.5 lakh individuals. This also forges that cru-



cial link between the mother complex and downstream units. A new local entrepreneurial class is coming up in the state of West Bengal and our policy is to encourage them. To that effect, there is already land use planning for small scale units to come up all along the way, in all the adjacent districts.

**Q: At what stage is the clearance for Haldia? Is there any further development regarding the issuing of the Letter of Intent or the clearance of the financial package?**

**A:** All the changes in the proposals regarding the extension and amalgamation of the Letter of Intent have moved expeditiously in the last few months. All the different stages of evaluation have been cleared. It is

**Q: Despite the attempt to set up an electronics complex in the state, major units are talking of putting up their complexes in other states. Telerama's second unit is coming up in Tamil Nadu, Sonodyne is moving to Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, Webel-Nicco, a joint sector company is moving to Uttar Pradesh...**

**A:** I can only say that the new incentive schemes announced by the government may change the tide.

**Q: The 840 MW, Rs 1,000 crore Bakreshwar thermal power project is another controversial project. Are there any further bottlenecks? Will the 2000 MW Sagardighi power plant be executed during the Eighth Plan?**

**A:** The Bakreshwar power project is a project which should have been

infrastructure for an all-India composite index of 100, West Bengal's composite index was 124, and Maharashtra's 114. But that does not mean that we are totally unaware of the need for significant improvement in different sectors, specially power, and that is where the Bakreshwar power plant comes in.

**Q: Labour forms an important constituent of this industrial resurgence. Have they been asked to cooperate?**

**A:** Our workers in the state are still the most socially responsible group in the country and given a challenge they can rise to it.

**Q: The National Front government has promised to help sick units in West Bengal. What policies are in the offing?**

**A:** This is a heartening development. The state government has taken a decision to allow the sale of surplus land and plough back the resultant proceeds as investment for the revival of sick and closed units. In this climate, the state government has announced attractive incentive schemes for new units as well as for the revival of closed units.

**Q: What policies have been formulated to encourage new units to come up?**

**A:** To encourage new units to come up, we have announced a sales tax holiday for 3-5 years, an investment subsidy varying from 15 to 30 per cent of the project cost. We are even granting an investment subsidy for new investment in closed and sick units. We are also encouraging workers to participate in equity shares in industrial cooperatives run by the workers themselves.

**Q: A well-known industrialist remarked a few months ago, in pre-Haldia days, that neither the politicians nor the bureaucrats of West Bengal are enthusiastic about industrialisation in the state. Please comment.**

**A:** Anyone who has heard the chief minister's speech when he was inaugurating the Salt Lake electronics complex three years ago cannot but believe in the inherent enthusiasm for industrialisation in the state by the political leadership. At every chamber of commerce meeting, every mass meeting he has reiterated the same theme. ●

**Interviewed by Debjani Sinha/Calcutta**



**West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu: keen on industry**

now awaiting the approval of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs, and this is expected within the next fortnight.

**Q: The MOU with Linde AG and Chemtex (two of R.P. Goenka's foreign collaborators for HPL) have been scrapped. Who are the new technical collaborators?**

**A:** The restructured board will take a decision on these matters very soon. Every decision including procedures will be made duly public and proper norms will be strictly enforced.

**Q: ACC's Subroto Ganguli is believed to have played a big role in swinging the deal in favour of the Tatas. Please comment.**

**A:** May I have the option of not answering the question?

**Q: There was also talk of him taking over as chief executive of the project. Is this going to happen?**

**A:** This should be apparent in the next few months.

cleared by the central government four years ago, and the Soviet credit made available to us. But that was denied—these facts are now well-known. However, a very positive development has taken place over the last few months. The central government has clearly announced its intention to pass on the Soviet credit meant for the project to the state. A joint Centre-state task force has been set up to identify the items to be covered under the Soviet credit. The report is expected by the end of next month.

**Q: Sagardighi?**

**A:** Sagardighi is expected to go on stream during the Eighth Plan period. This will also be a state sector project. We are looking into the modalities of financing this project including the possibility of bilateral assistance.

**Q: Infrastructure development seems to be a major bottleneck.**

**A:** The statistics prove otherwise. According to the CMIE's (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) data on



## ■ End of an era

With the formal split of the DCM group announced by the Delhi High Court, it brings to an end family infighting in one of India's top industrial houses. After years of cold-shouldering each other, Vinay Bharat Ram, Lala Bansi Dhar and Siddharth Shriram—the chiefs of the three new factions of the DCM family—got together for a press conference in Delhi. While that is an event in itself, corporate watchers are keener on how group companies will now be handled. Vinay keeps DCM's Bata-Hindu Rao complex, prime real estate which can finance his expansion plans for years in hi-tech areas. Plus DCM Data Products and DCM Toyota, which are both due a facelift. Siddharth, for his part, will expand his branch's *vanaspati* and sugar businesses. Bansi Dhar will focus on fertiliser—modernising the family's Kota plant—and cement besides keeping the Hindon River Mills. Business family splits have in recent years served to infuse dynamism into groups: the Birlas are a prime example. The DCM split can only help revitalise a struggling house.

## Now what?

It looks like K P Unnikrishnan versus Sam Pitroda, round 15 (or is it 100?) in a fight to the finish. There is talk now of Indian Telephone Industries Ltd (ITI) providing telephone exchange technology to buyers, with the UB Group's Unitel Ltd being the first one. This is significant, as

## STOCK QUOTE

**"If you want clearance for a project, don't go to the finance ministry. Try Bal Thackeray."**

*A top Bombay industrialist, after the Shiv Sena went public with its Reliance defence*



**Sam Pitroda**

communications minister. Unnikrishnan's hatchet man, K P P Nambiar, earlier ran ITI, and he claims that Pitroda, with his Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT), downplayed ITI's potential to serve his own switching system dreams. The point that the anti-Pitroda camp is making is that ITI has the technology, while C-DoT is way behind in its schedule for providing automatic exchanges all



**K.P. Unnikrishnan**

over the country. They may have a point—even Pitroda finds it difficult to defend C-DoT's non-deliverance. But what clouds the ITI assertion is that any anti-Pitroda move is seen as a witch-hunt, based more on political interest than fact. And a section of the government's advice to Pitroda seems to bear that out: lie low, till trouble blows over. And then Pitroda can go back to his claim of being India's telecom messiah.

## POLITICIAN OF THE WEEK

### Madhu Dandavate

Union minister of finance



● The professor has a problem, besides crumbling finances and promises. It has to do with defending the indefensible: telling the world that the Larsen & Toubro (L&T) compromise was *not* a compromise. He spent all of last week saying things such as "this is not the end" and "see what happens in the future," claiming that Dhirubhai Ambani is out of L&T—and favours—forever. Nobody is buying that line. The line they are is that the professor is defending his Raja.

## ■ The final conflict

The Pepsi saga has become tiresome, despite its being one of the most colourful policy battles in recent years. It now appears that fervent opponent Ramesh Chauhan, chief of the Parle group of companies, cannot keep up his assault, with a little help from politicians, against the US food and beverage company's cola launch in India. Pepsi Foods Ltd, the venture between PepsiCo Inc, Volta Ltd and Punjab Agro Industries Corp, has received the government's final clearance, and its soft-drink offering, Leher-Pepsi, is expected to hit the market in mid-May. Earlier, Pepsi officials were panicky



**Ramesh Chauhan: beaten back for good?**

about not being able to meet the peak summer deadline, a time when soft-drink manufacturers record maximum sales, thanks to intense lobbying by Chauhan. Could it be that George Fernandes is losing his touch and industry minister Ajit Singh is getting better at his act—free-for-all foreign investment?



# The politics of crime

*It contributes to the insecurity of the average Ulhasnagar resident*

It is known as counterfeit country. The tag 'Made in USA' may have prestige value for the uninitiated buyer who is looking for a bargain in the flea markets of Bombay, but wiser counsel has it that a bargain is only as good as its imitation. And when it comes to the ersatz, the Ulhasnagar Sindhis' Association (or USA), is unbeatable. Once a refugee transit camp, Ulhasnagar has today grown into a bustling township with a population of nearly five lakhs. It has spawned an entire counterfeit industry that has the dubious distinction of violating every patent law in the book. Cartier sunglasses, Gucci accessories, Piaget watches, Christian Dior ties, Coke tins, Chanel perfumes. The list is endless.

But along with the township's notoriety for its unique counterfeit culture, Ulhasnagar was fast gaining an unsavoury reputation of yet another kind. As Bombay's suburbia spread to Thane and beyond, including in its dragnet Ulhasnagar, there was the influx of the property developers and, once the legitimate means of acquiring real estate were exhausted, it was down to foul means. Land-grabbing had become a way of life in the township. So much so that, there were extortion squads who at the property developers' bidding flexed their muscles, extorted money and unleashed terror on the unsuspecting people of the township. As their areas of influence increased, the builders lobby began to make its presence felt in the municipal council too.

For the land sharks, who openly indulged in terror tactics and deployed their goon-squads at the slightest provocation, political sanction was the next step to unlimited power, and in this quest, Ulhasnagar was turned into gangsterland. Today, shoot-outs and slain bodies are as common in the streets of Ulhasnagar as cowboys and Clint Eastwood are to any self-respecting western.

But the trend was first noticed with the rise of Suresh, alias Pappu Kalani, a distillery owner, in the political arena. With his string of restaurants, hotels, distilleries and buildings in the township, Kalani was not short of either money or muscle power. But political power eluded him. This he tried to acquire by making his bid for the presidency of the Ulhasnagar Municipal Council (UMC). His quest had a typically bloody beginning: the council elections in June 1985 had to be postponed following the murder of a Shiv sainik. After the elections, it is alleged that Kalani kidnapped some of the councillors to his distillery at Igat-puri and forced them to elect him as president.



Kalani, however, had contended without Gopchand Bahrani, who like the former, is a Congressman and has hankered after the presidency.

of the UMC. The two rivals clashed time and again on a variety of issues, and Bahrani enlisted the help of yet another of Kalani's toes, a local builder, Gopal Rajwani. The rivalry between Rajwani and Kalani dated back to 1984, when a journalist, A V Narayan, who worked for the *Blitz* besides editing *Sahakar Sandesh*, a local daily brought out by Pappu Kalani, was found murdered. Narayan is believed to have exposed Rajwani's shady deals, and the story goes that in a fit of pique, Rajwani had the journalist eliminated. His henchmen were arrested but later let off on bail.

With Bahrani and Rajwani joining hands, the power equations in the township began to change. Kalani had managed to sideline Bahrani in his political battle. But the Bahrani-Rajwani duo, with their extortion squads, had established themselves as the undisputed kings of gangsterland. Rajwani had come into his own as a political leader when he was installed

**BJP members protesting against the rising crime rate in Ulhasnagar: politicising the murder; (inset) Pappu Kalani: not short of money or muscle power**





as chief of the local Agri Sena in 1988. And Bahrani was assured by the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) that he would share the presidency of the UMC with Kalani. The arrangement was that Kalani would give up his seat after a two-and-a-half year tenure in favour of Bahrani. But Kalani defaulted and come January 1989, fresh manipulations ensured that Kalani hung on to the UMC presidency.

It was then that a series of attacks were launched on Rajwani (no prizes for guessing who was behind them). Says Sitaldas Harchandani, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA who was defeated by the Congress' Pappu Kalani in the recent Assembly elections. "It's amazing how Rajwani has survived all those attempts on his life. At least thrice, bullets were pumped into his body and he's managed to bounce back."

Not only did he bounce back but he also hit out. Kalani's uncle, Dunchand, was the target and his henchman Ramesh Hemdev, alias Lalubhai, made no mistakes. But after the 8 April, 1989, murderous assault on Dunchand, Lalubhai was gunned down in a gangland-style shoot-out at Bombay's Sun n' Sand hotel in August last year. Even as the shoot-outs and the vendetta murders continued unabated, Kalani went on to win the Assembly election in February 1990.



**It took the gruesome murder of the 15-year-old Rinku Patil to raise the citizenry in protest against the "deteriorating law and order situation"**

Crime rate in Ulhasnagar			
	1988	1989	Jan-March '90
Murders	32	37	10
Attempts to murder	28	20	4
Dacoities	13	9	2
Robbery	100	85	7
Housebreaking (at daytime)	35	—	9
Housebreaking (by night)	370	314	57
Crimes of Class I-V (serious nature)	—	—	322
People externed	79	53	21
Held under NSA	4	6	4

In fact, on the day of the elections, 27 February, Bahrani's nephew, Ghan-shyam Bhatija, was gunned down.

**B**ut it took the gruesome murder of a 15-year-old schoolgirl, Rinku Patil, on 30 March by her alleged lover, Harish Patel to raise the consciousness of the citizenry to protest against the "deteriorating law and order situation". Bandhs and rallies were organised by every political party and for two consecutive days pandemonium reigned in the Assembly as politicians extracted the maximum possible mileage from the tragic episode. The police, in particular came in for some verbal battering too. Said Harchandani, "The police are so busy protecting Kalani and Rajwani that they don't have the time to do the routine policing jobs." The BJP organised a rally in Ulhasnagar berating the police for its shoddy work and put up a scoreboard of the number of murders committed during the last month. "Thirteen attempts to murder in 40 days, out of which eight cases proved to be fatal," pointed out Harchandani, as he castigated the police for failing to check the ever-rising crime rate. However, police commissioner, R D. Tyagi, who is responsible for the Thane commissionerate under which Ulhasnagar falls, argues, "As per the statistics, there hasn't been a spurt in crime either in the Thane commissionerate as a whole or in Ulhasnagar." But he admits that "between 25 February and 30 March there were five murders in quick succession and this has added to the sense of insecurity among the people." Among these, says Tyagi, "Ghan-shyam Bhatija's and Shyam Jadia's murders had some political overtones,

but it was the Rinku Patil murder that sent shockwaves among the people."

Agrees minister of state for home, Arun Mehta, "It's really unfortunate that the Rinku Patil murder happened. Not only was it terribly tragic but it has marginalised all the good work that commissioner Tyagi and deputy police commissioner (DCP) Y C. Pawar have been doing."

According to Mehta, the problem lies in the fact that gangsterism in Ulhasnagar is very different from that in Bombay. There it is related to the whole business of land-grabbing, illegal constructions, erection of buildings much beyond the FSI specifications, etc. And as Pramod Navalkar, MLC of the Shiv Sena said on the floor of the Assembly, "Ulhasnagar has become the departmental store of crime." And later to SUNDAY, Navalkar elaborated "Ulhasnagar has become a den of criminals. Every crime in the book is flourishing there, whether it's prostitution rackets, smuggling, thefts or murders." But he also feels that the criminal-police nexus is what is ruining the township.

Meanwhile, the police force in Ulhasnagar is being beefed up, Vasant Saraf, director-general of police pointed out that Ulhasnagar will now have one more assistant commissioner of police, more vehicles, wireless sets for better patrolling. "The jurisdiction of the Thane commissionerate is quite huge and includes urban as well as rural areas, which becomes a very difficult beat to tackle," Saraf explained.

And so, despite their good intentions, Ulhasnagar, counterfeit-country-turned-gangsterland, will continue to be a land where even angels fear to tread. •

**Aditya Chatterjee/Ulhasnagar**



# The burning train

*More than 70 people are killed in a disaster*



BIHAR

For Mithlesh Kumar Singh and his wife, Usha, it was a routine train journey from Patna Saheb station to their places of work. Little did they know that their journey on the Mokameh-Danapur shuttle on 16 April would be their last ride together. When the couple boarded the train, they noticed an oxy-acetylene cylinder being loaded inside their compartment. Since gas cylinders and other inflammable goods are often carried on passenger trains in Bihar, nobody protested.

All was well till the train moved out of the next station, Gulzarbagh. According to some reports, by then the cylinder was already leaking, and when someone lit a cigarette, the coach burst into flames. The fire was so intense that nobody got chance to escape. The desperate passengers tried to stop the train by pulling the alarm chain. But it did not help because the system had been disconnected by the railway authorities to prevent its misuse by the daily passengers. Those travelling on the roof of the train and standing by the doors managed to jump off. A shattered Mahesh Thakur who vainly tried to save a young boy, is still haunted by his cries "Uncle mujhe bachalo".

The burning train kept moving. The villagers living by the side of the rail tracks tried their best to attract the engine driver's attention, but to no avail. By some stroke of luck the train halted just before the Rajendranagar station, four kms east of Patna Junction. Vidya Prasad Singh, the engine driver, maintains that he stopped the train after getting a signal from a gate-man and then sent one of his colleagues to alert the Rajendranagar station, while he himself went to detach the rest of the coaches from the

one that was burning. Others have said that the train stopped only after the vacuum hose was severed.

But by the time the train stopped, men, women and children were engulfed by the ravaging fire. Mithlesh Kumar Singh was one of the few who managed to get out of the coach with third-degree burns. Said he: "I became unconscious after I fell down. I have no idea what happened to Usha." After half an hour, fire brigade personnel put out the flames.

The news of the mishap spread like wildfire in the neighbourhood. Chief minister Laloo P. Yadav and Janata Dal MP Nitish Kumar rushed to the spot along with officials of the Eastern Railways and the district administration. The two major hospitals—Patna Medical College Hospital and Nalanda Medical had a trying time coping with the large number of casualties. Railway minister George Fernandes too, rushed to Patna in a special aircraft. He announced free medical facilities for the injured and a compensation of Rs two lakhs for the next of kin of the dead. The minister also ordered a judicial inquiry into the incident. State health minister Raghunath Jha announced that a sum of Rs 50,000 would be sanctioned for the purchase of medicines. But soon after the VIPs left Patna, the scenario changed completely. Concern gave way to indifference. On the morning of 17 April, Mithlesh Kumar Singh and Mahesh Lal Sharma died for want of oxygen. While the railway officials and the hospital authorities traded

charges at each other, the condition of many others rapidly deteriorated. Four days after the ordeal, the death toll was as high as 70, with only 65 bodies having been identified. In the morgue where the bodies were kept, people shouted and cried for their relatives, and as long as the bodies were not identified, hope was never given up.

**The incident brings into sharp focus the apathy of the railway authorities**



The incident brings into sharp focus the apathy of the railway authorities towards the daily commuters. There are no local train services and there is only one shuttle from Mokameh to Buxar via Patna which is used by both office-goers and vendors. On the day of the accident, the doors of the ill-fated coach were blocked by baskets of vegetables and milk cans.

Whenever there is a demand for more trains on this route, railway authorities plead helplessness on



account of the heavy traffic on this route. A day after the incident, commuters threw away baskets and cans which were loaded on trains by vendors. Passengers are now demanding a luggage van but it is doubtful whether their wishes will be fulfilled. Many are now wondering if the alarm chain will ever function again.



(Above) The charred remains of the compartment; one of the injured undergoing treatment in hospital: victim of apathy

Who exactly loaded the cylinder in the compartment is not known. While no one has claimed the ill-fated gas cylinder, it is believed that it belonged to the railway authorities themselves. George Fernandes, however, has declared that nothing will be revealed until the enquiries are over. •

**Jalshankar Gupta/Patna**

## Friends no longer

*Simranjeet Singh Mann and Ram Jethmalani fall out over the former's demand for a plebiscite in Punjab*



DELHI

By now, Simranjeet Singh Mann has become accustomed to receiving hate mail. One letter that reached him in Amritsar read, "You have made yourself seem ridiculous. You will be dismissed by everyone there as another crank." Towards the end, the letter was even more accusing: "You have done nothing less than stabbing me right in my heart. The wounds you have caused will never heal."

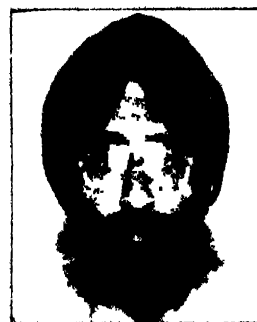
But what the Akali leader must have found hard to believe is that such a fierce attack could ever come from Ram Jethmalani, the lawyer-politician who has been his ardent supporter for five long years. Moreover, he had not expected that Jethmalani would make his anger public by releasing the letter to the press. When Mann was in Bhagalpur Jail, Jethmalani volunteered to take up his brief free of cost. Once Mann was released, thanks to a directive from Rajiv Gandhi, Jethmalani flooded the press with statements that Mann held the key to peace in

Punjab and that he was the only answer for a stable leadership in the state.

So, what went wrong? The immediate provocation that drew Jethmalani's ire was Mann's demand for a plebiscite, with United Nations observers, in Punjab. The appeal was made in Damdama Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi—the very day Prime Minister V.P. Singh was in Amritsar making an oft-heard speech about peace and secularism.

Jethmalani later admitted to SUNDAY that Mann's suggestion for a

direct vote was the last straw for him. He fumed, "I would be putting it mildly if I say Mann has become a little unbalanced. Only 24 hours earlier he made a sane speech at the National Integration Council. Then what happened?" Mann has no idea about the functioning of the UN. The UN is not a human rights organisation as he thinks. Mann thinks that the government is lethargic, but how can he expect the government to move at his pace?"



Mann (above) and Jethmalani: parting ways

On the other hand, by making such statements Jethmalani could well be giving his own game away. Though he denies it, there are rumours that the lawyer was under considerable pressure from the Janata Dal leadership to distance himself from Mann. According to one view, it was no coincidence that Jethmalani's letter was written on the eve of V.P. Singh's Cabinet reshuffle. The government was now slowly switching options in favour of the moderate leadership of Badal and therefore, was uncomfortable with the backing given by Jethmalani to Mann's coterie.

Even before the *kirpan* controversy had died down, Mann found himself caught in another unseemly controversy. Curiously, there was no explanation on how or why he wanted the plebiscite. Instead, his supporters tried to make out that Mann had never used the word 'plebiscite' and that there had been some misinterpretation by his followers after Mann's press conference at Talwandi Sabo, in Bhatinda. By offering no explanation, Mann has only strengthened the belief that, today he stands for only one thing in Punjab: confusion. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



# Loan ranger

*The economy flounders as chief minister Patwa struggles to write off farmers' debts*



MADHYA PRADESH

For chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa the time has come to fulfil his promises. Before the Assembly elections in February, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had promised the state's farmers that it would write off agricultural loans to the tune of Rs 10,000 each and the BJP government is now trying to honour that pledge. But it has discovered that waiving farm loans is easier said than done.

The state's finance minister,

But a piquant situation has developed as the disbursement of loans to farmers before the *kharif* season was to have begun by 1 April, but managers of several cooperative banks told SUNDAY that they have received no instructions yet to that effect. Another difficulty faced by them is that all district central cooperative banks and district land development banks have become defaulters under the cooperative rules as they have failed to recover 40 per cent of the loans advanced by them. In the 1988-89 period they got back only about Rs 54.50 crores out of a total advance of Rs 400.60 crores, and in the 1989-90

period, which ended on 1 March, the banks managed to recover only a paltry Rs 14.26 crores against advances amounting to a whopping Rs 532.67 crores.

According to Radhe Shyam Sharma, president, Madhya Pradesh Land Development Bank, all district central cooperative banks and land development banks have become defaulters and so have lakhs of farmers. Under the rules of the National Apex Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), the cooperative banks will not be entitled to fresh loans till they pay back 40 per cent of the loans they had taken from the apex body.

Both Sharma and Subhas Yadav, president, Madhya Pradesh State Cooperative Bank, have written to chief minister Patwa demanding a long term loan of Rs 80 crores for the cooperative banks and have requested him to get the NABARD rule relaxed. But it will be quite a while before that is done, and, in the meantime, the *kharif* crops stand to suffer, as the farmers are not getting the loans they urgently need.

M. V. Kher/Rajpur



Sunder Lal Patwa: mobilising resources

Ramhit Gupta, is presently engaged in a hard exercise to mobilise funds from various departments to enable the government to write off the loans. To raise about Rs 150 crores that the government will need to fulfil its promise, the finance minister has issued a blanket ban on all departmental payments except those needed for meeting establishment and emergency expenses. This has virtually halted all developmental work and has applied the brakes on the state's economy.

# Flaming Towers

*Fire breaks out in the new Oberoi hotel in Bombay*



MAHARASHTRA

It was every hotelier's nightmare come true—a conflagration in his prized property. Late on the night of 12 April, the glitzy 35-storey Oberoi Towers building caught fire. Considering its sheer size—the old building has 1,050 rooms, while the new 21-storey hotel has 350 rooms—the fact that there were no casualties, is a sheer miracle. A major tragedy was averted not because of luck, but due to "the excellent training that we give our staff", says Niloufer Billimoria, the official spokesperson for Oberoi Towers.

Though the exact location of the fire is not known, reports said it started in the kitchen at the basement have now been ruled out. It is now believed that it started in the lower lobby level which houses the Kashmiri carpet shops and leather boutiques. It then spread to the reception at the lobby level.

This is not the first time that a major fire has broken out in a hotel in India. On 22 January, 1986, a fire at Delhi's Hotel Siddharth claimed 34 lives. Compared to this, the Oberoi Towers appears to have come off quite lightly. However, there has been criticism that the guests were not told about the fire even an hour after it had broken out. But Billimoria says that all the guests were informed through the public address system. The hotel, she says, was adequately equipped with heat and smoke detectors, extinguishers and fire alarms. Even so, the fire spread and the smoke passed through the air-conditioning ducts and reached the rooms. Most of the guests at the hotel complained of the dense smoke which made running away difficult. It was the prompt action on the part of the firemen and the hotel staff which helped the guests to leave the hotel premises.

Olga Tellis/Bombay





Mahant Avaidyanath (second from left) and other VHP leaders: clearing misconceptions

the construction of the temple. Appropriately, analogies were drawn from the *Ramayan* to press home this point. Mahant Nritya Gopal Das of the Mukti Samiti thundered: "Even Ram gave Ravan time to return Sita after she was abducted. Similarly, we have given time to the Janata Dal. After all, remember, even the Congress hadn't done anything about this for 40 years." And then he came to the crux of the matter: "But Ravan did nothing with the time given to him. The govern-

ment too has done nothing so far. Instead, Muslims are being pampered in every way. If we are not allowed to construct the temple on 8 June (the deadline set by the VHP) we will bring down the government just like we brought down the Congress."

But with talk of a war with Pakistan, will they go back on their decision? "We will do so only if India unequivocally declares war on Pakistan," says Avaidyanath, adding that the "Punjab and Kashmir problems will always remain. The root of this is Section 370 in Kashmir because its special status has given rise to secessionist movements in Punjab and parts of the north-east as well." The solution to the problem posed by the militants lies in "bombarding all the training camps", says the religious leader.

An interesting fallout of this development is the slow ascendance of Swami Swaroopanand, the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth. This religious head, who has resolved to hold afresh the *shilanyas* inside the disputed area "with the support of Muslims" on 7 May, was dismissed as a Congress(I) stooge. But ever since he camped in Ayodhya last month for about ten days, he is said to have won the support of a number of prominent *mahants* and *sants*. Avaidyanath and Gopal Das predictably dismissed him as a "non-entity." The former said, "It is the old habit of Hindus to fight one another." The Shankaracharya's followers in Ayodhya, have, of course, not yet worked out the logistics of holding the *shilanyas* inside the disputed site. All they said was that if the government tried to prevent them they would simply court arrest. ●

Radhika Ramaseshan/Lucknow

## The holy yatra

*The VHP launches a mass contact programme to explain its stand*



UTTAR PRADESH

The much-trumpeted *dharma jagran yatra* (religious awakening tour) organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) began with a whimper on 16 April. According to reports, over 1,500 volunteers were expected to congregate from different parts of Uttar Pradesh, but the turnout was a poor 500. However, this did not dampen the spirit of the organisers: the speeches delivered from the podium were marked by familiar stridency and combativeness. The following morning, a convoy of 30 vehicles left for Varanasi, the next stop on the VHP's itinerary, before proceeding to Chitrakoot, Kanpur and Agra.

The *yatra* was to culminate at Mathura in a public rally on 21 April. While Varanasi and Mathura were chosen because the VHP has vowed to "liberate" both the Kashi Vishwanath temple and the Krishna Janmabhoomi in these places, Chitrakoot was selected because it has a geographical association with the *Ramayan*. The other

towns, explain VHP leaders, happen to be the most important cities on the VHP's route.

Mahant Avaidyanath, MP from Gorakhpur and president of the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti, told SUNDAY that the main objective of the programme was "to clear certain misconceptions that have been existing in the minds of the Hindus after we decided to postpone the construction of the Ram temple by four months". He specifically referred to the quibbling among the organisation's leaders about the manner in which the crores of rupees that poured in for the Ram Shila *pujas* last year were spent. Many, in fact, questioned the need to spend Rs 1.63 crores on the *pujas* and the *shilanyas* out of the

the Rs 8.29 crores that were raised. Added to this were the allegations that the VHP was being generously aided by foreign patrons. Avaidyanath, however, denied these charges.

The other "misconception" the VHP sought to clear in the course of its *yatra* was that it had not "compromised in any way with the Janata Dal government" by deferring

**The VHP says that it has not compromised with the Janata Dal government**



# Intruders in the east

*Burmese soldiers cross the border while pursuing Chin rebels*



MIZORAM

The violation of the Indian border by foreign troops is not confined to Kashmir alone. Adding to the worry of the South Block, Burma has massed up its regulars near the Tiddim sector of its border with east Mizoram. At least three times in the past four weeks, the Burmese forces crossed the border and intruded into villages near the sub-divisional town of Champai, in Mizoram.

During one such foray, the Burmese troops abducted 108 people from the border village of Lawnum. (They were let off the next day). It was followed up by another raid on Tlangsam village, situated three kilometres inside Indian territory and injured a fleeing villager in the process.

sprung up inside Mizoram. It is no secret that the V P Singh regime (as was Rajiv Gandhi's government earlier) is soft towards the Chin rebels as they are known to be pro-India and have links with the pro-democracy forces in Burma. The Chins have ethnic kinship with the Mizo tribes, and at least three guerrilla bands active in the Chin state have vowed to join India after carving out an independent state from Burma.

Indian intelligence sources say that of late there has been a sudden spurt in insurgent activities in Burma, and explain why the Chin state has become restive. The resurgence in violence is linked with the groundswell of opposition to the proposed 27 May general elections in Burma, announced by the military regime of Gen Saw Mawng.

Congress (I) leaders in

Mizoram, however, are not much enthusiastic about this revolt by their kinsfolk in the neighbouring Chin state. They fear that the separatist upheavals by the Chin Hills is likely to be exploited by the opposition Democratic Party (DP), whose leaders, including former chief minister Brig Sailo, are trying to build up a movement for the amalgamation of the adjoining Mizo areas

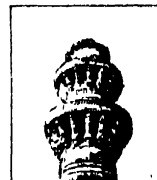
of Burma, Bangladesh and India under a single administrative roof within the Indian Union.

New Delhi is clearly in a dilemma. While it is understandably reluctant to provide sanctuary to the Chin separatists in Mizoram, it simply cannot force the Burmese refugees, mostly students, to leave the Champai camp, as they are the victims of army persecution. The Champai shelter was opened in the winter of 1988 and if some students double as insurgents or provide shelters to the guerrillas on the retreat, there is nothing the Centre can do but look the other way. •

**Santanu Ghosh/Alzawl**

# The great divide

*Communal feelings harden following recurring clashes*



GUJARAT

It only needed a spark to ignite the charged atmosphere. And it was provided on 29 March by the murder of Girish Patel, president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in broad daylight in the Muslim-dominated Bhalej village of Kaira district in Gujarat. The incident immediately triggered communal rioting in Ahmedabad. In a week-long orgy of violence that began on 3 April—the Ramnavami day—some 50 people were killed, and 200 others injured. Besides, property worth Rs 150 crores was lost in different cases of arson and looting.

Since 1985, Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat have been living in a state of communal disharmony, and with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming to power, communal feelings on both sides have hardened. The communal climate became vitiated after the BJP seized control of the Ahmedabad municipal corporation in 1987. The situation further deteriorated with the party joining the coalition ministry on 12 March. The communal rift widened during the Assembly elections when the rank and file of the BJP declared that it did not want Muslim votes. Moreover, the mass influx of Muslims into the Janata Dal on the eve of the polls, and the policies of Prime Minister V.P. Singh and the Gujarat chief minister, Chimanbhai Patel, to woo the community also angered the Hindu fundamentalists.

This time around, tension began to mount with minor clashes in smaller towns like Patan, Sidhpur and Broach. The murder of the VHP leader in Bhalej was followed by a retaliatory step in which an innocent Muslim youth was killed on 3 April. This set off a chain of communal clashes in Ahmedabad.



Leaders of the Chin National Front: seeking refuge

Though the Burmese authorities from Tiddim, which is located in the disturbed Chin hill state of west Burma, have assured the SDO (subdivisional officer) of Champai at a flag-meeting in early April that the border violations were not wilful, the Mizoram government is not taking any chances. The state home minister, C L Ruala, told SUNDAY, "We have moved the Assam Rifles in full battle gear to the border areas, as we cannot afford to tinker with the safety of our people living along the border."

The insurgency of the Chin separatists in Burma has given a new dimension to the border transgressions. Hideouts of the insurgents have



Not all violence was due to Hindu-Muslim animosity though. The sudden crack-down on liquor joints and gambling dens angered the owners who are said to have donated lakhs of rupees to all the three major political parties—the Congress (I), the BJP and the Janata Dal—before the 27 February Assembly polls. The over-enthusiastic Chimanbhai Patel, who heads the coalition ministry, ordered raids on these hideouts to make it known to the people that he wanted to create a 'naya Gujarat'. He thus incurred the displeasure of the bootleggers and other antisocials who together number one lakh. Evidently, they played an important role in spreading violence in an attempt to destabilise the government.

A notable feature of the riots was



**Property worth Rs 150 crores was lost in different cases of arson**

state told SUNDAY that since the BJP leaders were unhappy with the portfolios given to their party, they were determined to discredit Chimanbhai Patel. After all, it is an open secret that the BJP, with 67 seats, compared to the Dal's 70, is not willing to accept the Janata Dal as the big brother in the coalition ministry.

The situation was brought under control on the fifth day, when the

## Lost and not found

*The wife of a ship's officer disappears without trace in the high seas*



MAHARASHTRA

Mystery shrouds the disappearance of Latika Mishra, wife of the second officer of Jala Tapi, a ship chartered by the Constellation Shipping Company of Bombay. Latika, 24, who was on board, disappeared without trace on 9 January while the ship was on its way to the Soviet port of Odessa.

At 4.15 am on 9 January, Anil Kailashchandra Mishra, 26, the ship's second officer, returned to his cabin after completing his duty on the bridge. As he opened the door to his cabin and switched on the lights, Mishra was a trifle surprised his wife Latika, was nowhere to be seen. But his surprise turned into consternation after he discovered a half-empty whisky bottle and a cryptic note signed by her, which said, "I am leaving," lying on a table.

The ship was then in the high seas, between Bosphorous and the Black Sea Port of Odessa, when Mishra discovered that his wife was missing. In his first statement before the ship's captain, T A. Cardoza, Mishra said: "At 4.15 am I opened the cabin with the key and put on the light and my eyes fell on the open whisky bottle on the table. A cap was lying on the side of the bottle which was half-filled. My eyes fell on the bed. My wife was not on the bed. Then I noticed a piece of paper under the whisky bottle, which I read. She had written in Hindi 'I am leaving—Latika Dube'."

"I looked for her in the toilet, the captain's deck, outside on the port and the star board sides, and the bridge deck, expecting her to be asleep somewhere as I had noticed that the bed-sheet and the counterpane were missing too."

But Mishra's frantic search proved futile. Latika was nowhere to be seen. Ten minutes later, at 4.25 am, the second officer rushed to the ship's



**Black Cat commandos survey a disturbed area: orgy of violence**

that the miscreants seemed to be well organised. In several cases the police discovered that petrol was sprayed into shops before they were set alight. This is also the first time that even patients inside a hospital were attacked.

The BJP and the VHP workers also played a big role in whipping up a communal frenzy. In riot-torn Baroda where 15 people died, the police blame the BJP and VHP activists for having raised inflammatory slogans. During a VHP sponsored *bandh* in Ahmedabad on 6 April, BJP sympathisers were seen forcing shopkeepers to down their shutters. A number of senior Janata Dal leaders in the

army staged a flag march. A delegation of Congress MPs that toured the riot-hit areas congratulated Patel for the manner in which he handled the situation. But Patel's problems did not end with peace returning to Ahmedabad on 13 April. By then it was time for Baroda to become communally restive. In four days of mindless violence, two persons were stabbed at Huzrat Paga. As a precautionary measure, the police banned meetings and processions in the sensitive areas of the city. And though the situation became normal soon afterwards, the danger of riots breaking out in the Mahatma's land still remains. •

**Mahesh Trivedi/Ahmedabad**



chief officer to report the incident. Moments later, he was back in the cabin with the chief officer and, this time, Mishra discovered that the porthole next to the bed was open.

On 12 January, the Jala Tapi reached Odessa port in the USSR. The captain of the ship contacted the Indian consul general, A G Sharma, and reported the matter to him. The consul visited the ship the same day and carried out an investigation by interviewing the ship's crew, including Mishra, and certified the log book entries maintained by the captain, to be correct. The captain and Sharma also agreed that Mishra, who was in a distraught state of mind, should be sent back to India.

The Jala Tapi had set sail with 30 people on board, including four women, from Kandla port in Gujarat on 25 December, 1989 and Mishra returned to India on 20 January this year. Soon after his return, Mishra and his father-in-law, K P Dube accused the ship's crew of foul play,

and Mishra even said that the search operation had not been thorough enough. What is significant, however, is the fact that Mishra made no such complaint while he was on board and nor before the Indian consul general at Odessa.

On 6 April, Constellation Shipping Company received a bombshell from the director general (DG) of shipping. In a telex message, the DG referred to Latika's disappearance as a "brutal murder" and asked the company to rush all details to the ministry of surface transport.

As things stand, the reports of the enquiries that were started after the ship berthed in Bombay, are being sent to the government of India and it will be some time before the findings are made public. The mystery deepened following a complaint Mishra

### Latika's father rejects the suggestion that she committed suicide

lodged with the commissioner of Bombay police in which he stated in "full confidence and belief" that "somebody, who had the master key, got into the cabin. The key was missing after that and yet the Captain made no mention of this to the consul general at Odessa."

Meanwhile, rumours are doing the rounds that all keys fitted all the cabins in the ship and anyone could have sneaked into Mishra's cabin. One theory is that Latika jumped out of the porthole, which shipping circles say, is possible. But another view is that she would have landed on the deck if she did, and would have to jump again to go overboard. And Latika's father vehemently rejects any suggestion that his daughter committed suicide—she was not the type, he insists. But it will be a while before the truth is known. •

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**

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**S**ince nothing else was working, Pooja Bedi has now decided to go in for a new image. The new Pooja Bedi is sober, (yes, sober as in opposed to drunk). And mature—well, almost. She talks about how important trust is in all relationships, and how life is tough, damn tough, but meaningful nevertheless. She insists she knows what her ideal man looks like: he's tall, fair and has light eyes.

Well, some things never change. And Aditya Pancholi, for one, is glad they don't.

**W**ith Salman Khan having taken over the Heart-throb Khan mantle from



**Aamir Khan: ousted**

Aamir Khan, the latter is really in dire straits. He is often seen cycling in Juhu, staring out at the sea with an understandable air of wistfulness. Though Aamir had never got addicted to the heady fame of the post *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* days, being left out in the cold, couldn't be much fun.

Salman, for his part, is at his coolest best, when asked about his new-found popularity. He does not consider himself competition for anyone leave alone Aamir Khan. No he doesn't think Aamir is badly off at all: the girls still go for him. Aamir is doing films, good films and nothing has changed for him.

But then the new heart-throb can afford to be magnanimous after *Maine Pyar Kiya*.

HIRAK SEN



**Pooja Bedi: some things never change**

**W**ith *Mahabharat* swiftly drawing to a close, Rupa (Draupadi) Ganguly is all prepared for a film career in Bombay. But things don't seem to be going too well for her.

For, after her marvellous break in B.R. Chopra's tele-serial (after some eminently unwatchable performances on Calcutta

Doordarshan's shows) she has only managed to sign films opposite such minor fry as Tarik Shah, Javed Jaffrey, and Sumeet Saigal.

Rupa is quick to remind us, though, of the film she is doing with Sanjay Dutt. And, we don't have the heart to tell her that Dutt

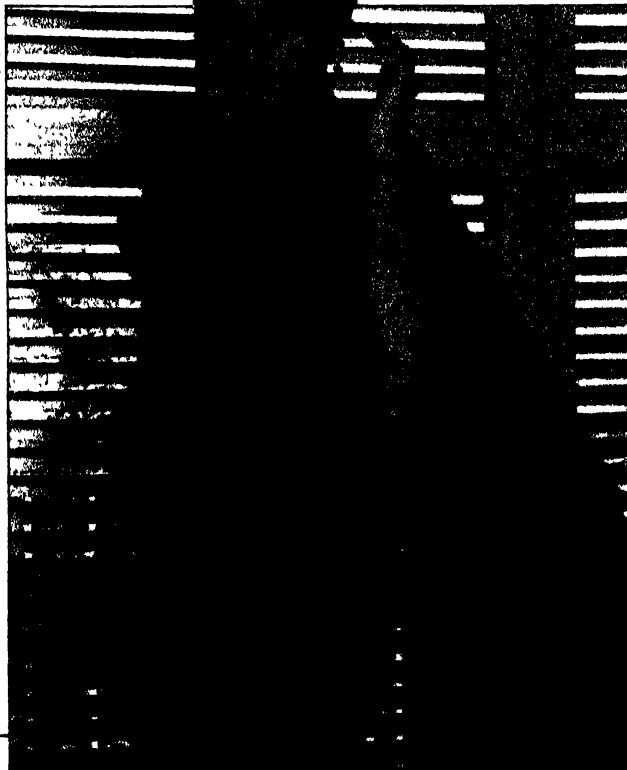
and his brand of *machismo* are both quite

**Rupa Ganguly: Inverted logic**

dated by now.

With an exhibition of inverted logic that would do a lawyer proud, she presents her reasons for signing up with such lesser lights. She isn't arrogant, she says, and couldn't dream of discouraging deserving youngsters. Also, (this, with a certain far-sightedness) "tomorrow if Anil and Jackie refused to act against me I would feel bad."

SALIM PAL



**M**eenakshi Seshadri, the incredible flop machine from down south, (where else?) continues to churn out one flop after another with monotonous regularity. And each flop leaves her with fewer friends. Such are the ways of the Bombay film world.

She does have one friend though. The evergreen, ageless Dev Anand vouches for Ms Seshadri with a passion that would put an Anil Kapoor (of two years ago) to shame. She is beautiful, he says, and a fantastic dancer too. Then why doesn't the marvellous Seshadri find a place in any of his films?

That is where Dev's famed eloquence fails him.



# The Midas of movies

*Everything Malayali filmstar Mammooty touches, turns to gold*

**H**e is cool. He is tough. He has steel in his eyes. He does not rant at the drop of a hat, but when he talks, the lines are punchy enough to hit the audience hard. He cannot dance or fight ten villains at the same time. But for all that, he is the undisputed superstar of Malayalam cinema. Mammooty, the 38-year-old lawyer-turned-star has the highly cinema-conscious Malayalis in Kerala and the Gulf running after him, forming fan clubs. And in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, he has a fanatical following among audiences brought up on MGR, Rajanikant and Kamalahasan. Last year, Mammooty's *CBI Diary Kurippu*, (CBI's diary notings) in which he plays a CBI officer Perumal, who does not fight or romance, ran for a whopping 35 weeks in the prestigious Safire Theatre in Madras.

Has the Malayali finally fallen prey to the hero-worship syndrome prevailing in other southern states? No, seems to be the answer, as the new films that are drawing audiences in droves are neither the corny family tear-jerkers of the late demigod Prem Nazir's era, nor C-Grade erotica, but films rooted firmly in life. And to a large extent, Mammooty is responsible for changing the format of movie-making in Kerala. Mammooty and Mohanlal (the other superstar in Kerala) have changed the traditional concept of heroes. Today, they have a streak of villainy and *machismo*, bringing dialogues close to life and making violence believable on screen.

Mammooty is not a chocolate-faced hero but an actor's actor. A man who can play Krishnamoorthy, the investigative journalist turned avenger in *New Delhi*, or a village ruffian with a comical angle in *Kottayam Kunjachan*, the uncouth buck-toothed hunter of *Mrigaya* or the simple straight forward Basheer in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's classic *Mathilukal*, is nothing if not versatile. In fact, last week when Mammooty bagged the national award for the best actor for *Mathilukal* and *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*, it established beyond doubt his acting ability.

It has been a difficult climb to the top for Mohammed Kutty whose friends shortened his name to Mammooty. Born in a lower middle class family in Vaikkam, Mammooty completed his education at the prestigious Maharaja's College in Cochin. For some time, he was a practising lawyer at Manjeri near Calicut before he got introduced to well-known writer M.T. Vasudevan Nair at a local film festival. Nair offered him a role in *Devalokam* but subsequently the film was shelved. Later he made his debut in K.G. George's *Mela* in 1979 as a balloon-seller. The film flopped but Mammooty was noticed. Incidentally, it was K.G. George again who cata-

pulted him into the hero's role in *Yavanuka*, released in 1983, where he plays an inspector investigating a murder. It was George again, a member of the national film jury, who campaigned for him to get the best actor award.

Mammooty was not choosy about his roles and took anything that came his way. The tall, well-built actor with his macho appeal and shy half-smile soon became a rage with females in Kerala. During 1985-86, while Prem Nazir was sitting at home, the new romantic hero Mammooty was working overtime dishing out almost 30 films a year. The roles he enacted, like the one in I.V. Sasi's *Kanamarayatu*

**Superstar Mammooty in a scene from *Vadakkan Veera Gatha*: his name spells box-office magic**





where he plays a middle-aged bachelor, reluctant at first to be seduced by a luscious 18-year-old, but who later succumbs to her charms in the Mills and Boon tradition, had women swooning over him

It was at this time that Mammootty read Irving Wallace's *Almighty* and passed the book on to the master plagiarist Dennis Joseph. Joseph, director Joshy and Mammootty sat together for days and after suitably Indianising *Almighty* made it into *New Delhi*. Mammootty plays Krishnamoorthy, the crusading journalist, who is tortured by his political detractors and becomes a cripple for life. He takes revenge on them, years later, when he starts a newspaper called *New Delhi* and kills his enemies through the help of a group of mercenaries and then front-pages the scoop. The film in which Mammootty masterminds at least seven murders went on to become a mega-hit all over south India. Since then, Mammootty has not looked back.

Sitting in his house, 'Suruma', in Cochin, bereft of any star trappings,

## Says Mammootty: "I agree I make good money. But it is nothing compared to what superstars in Hindi and Tamil movies make"

wearing a *dhoti* and sipping tea, Mammootty told SUNDAY as he puffed on his *bidi*: "The romantic star image will not work in modern day Malayalam cinema. The hero is no longer a chocolate-faced do-gooder. In fact, there is only a thin dividing line left between him and the villain." Mammootty feels that he and Mohan Lal cannot be

termed as conventional superstars because they don't do outrageously stupid things required for such an image.

More than his superstar status, Mammootty always wanted to be known as a fine actor. It was this passion for good meaty roles, that got him the coveted role of Basheer in *Mathulakal*. He was more than willing to shed ten kilos to play the role of Vaikam Mohammed Basheer, who is imprisoned during the freedom movement. Says Adoor Gopalakrishnan: "Mammootty is not only a fine human being, but also one of the best actors in the country. A man with no star-hang ups and totally involved in his work." Adoor, who correctly predicted that Mammootty would walk away with this year's national award, strongly feels that he may also get the prestigious best actor award at this year's Venice film festival for the same film.

But detractors of Mammootty feel that he has killed romantic films, good musicals, works based on Malayalam literature, and he is also held responsible for the increase in cost of production. Added to that Mammootty has three favourite script-writers who specialise in penning author-backed roles—S.N. Swamy, Dennis Joseph and Lohitadas. Mammootty who is a voracious reader and sees a lot of films on video gets "inspired" and asks his favourites to rework it to suit the local audience. Says S.N. Swamy, a top script-writer: "I agree some of my films are inspired by foreign films and books. But we take only the basic thread of the story to suit our audiences' taste."

Added to that there is a feeling in the industry that Mammootty has been largely responsible for spiralling costs in production. In 1985, the production cost of a big star movie used to be around Rs 20 lakhs. Today, a Mammootty film can cost anything upwards of Rs 45 lakhs. Mammootty himself, charges a whopping Rs six lakhs per film, while Prem Nazir during his heydays used to get only one and a half lakh. Says Mammootty: "I agree I make good money but nothing compared to superstars in Hindi and Tamil. But my producers make more money, since my films have a market outside the state also."

Mammootty, a devout Muslim, is happily married to Zulfat and has two children. He has so far never been involved in any scandals. His money is managed by his brothers. Says Mammootty: "I am basically a family man who loves to be with his wife and kids. At the same time, I breathe and eat cinema." Due to his popularity in Tamil Nadu, he is doing two films in Tamil and is also very keen to do a Hindi movie. Says Mammootty: "However, I would not like to make the same mistakes as Kamalhasan when he played a Tamilian from his first film in Hindi and was type cast since then."

Mammootty is almost certain to try his luck in commercial Hindi cinema and a couple of projects are being worked out. However, he states that he will continue to act in Malayalam movies. Confesses Mammootty: "Malayalam cinema is the best in the country with good directors and technicians. The only plus point as far as Hindi cinema is concerned is that you are seen all over the country." •

Sreedhar Pillay/Cochin







# Around the world

*Saloo and Nina Chowdhury travel through 25 countries in 69 days, earning a mention in the Guinness Book Of World Records*

**J**ules Verne would have been impressed. Saloo and Nina Chowdhury have done what his immortal characters, Phineas Fogg and Passepartout, couldn't. Gone around the world in less than 80 days! To be precise, the couple from Calcutta circumnavigated six continents in their Contessa Classic, traversing 45,000 kms through 25 countries in just 69 days. And at the end of it all, the Chowdhurys received due recognition: a mention in the *Guinness Book Of World Records*.

"Winning a championship is not the same every year there is a new champion," says 42-year-old Saloo Chowdhury for whom cars have been a magnificent obsession. A restorer of vintage cars, he, with his wife Nina, has participated in a number of international rallies. But it was after the Great American Race in 1987, that the Chowdhurys acquired celebrity status. "Ever since," he says, "we have been planning for this event. We wanted to be the first human beings to circumnavigate the globe."

But as the couple realised, that was easier said than done. The world record for the fastest circumnavigation

of the globe was held by two Canadians—Gary Sowerby and Ken Langley—who zipped through four continents in their Volvo 245 DL in 74 days in 1980. Nine years later, the Chowdhurys were to better this feat. But the couple were up against formidable odds, if they wished to be the record-holders—they were informed by Sheila Goldsmith, deputy editor of *Guinness Book*—they would have to drive through six continents. Also, they would have to use the same vehicle and the same crew. "It was an extreme test of human endurance," says Saloo.

The zeal to see their "names permanently in the record books", however, was unquenchable and thus began the search for funding. The Chowdhurys approached some foreign automobile companies but were disappointed. Few were willing to put their confidence in the rallyists from India, especially as it involved big money. When a bank in England did offer to sponsor their trip, the Chowdhurys rejected it. Explains Saloo, "They offered to finance us and all logistics would have been taken care of but their condition was that we

couldn't fly the Indian flag. In all international rallies I have flown the Indian flag. We tried to negotiate but ultimately I refused."

Just when everything seemed to be going against them, Saloo met J N Sapru of ITC Ltd who had made a speech about how champions are







#### The Chowdhurys' progress round the world: unparalleled feat

made in India. When Saloo explained what he had in mind, Sapru immediately agreed to give them everything that they needed. But his condition was that they should drive an Indian car. They settled for the Contessa Classic, as many recommended it for its new 1.8 GL engine. Eventually, the Chowdhury's record-breaking journey was sponsored not just by the ITC but by four other companies. While C.K. Birla of Hindustan Motors gifted the Contessa to the Chowdhurys, Dunlop Tyres chipped in with tyres, Air India agreed to air-lift the car (which formed a huge chunk of the

Rs 25 lakh budget) and the Tea Board put in the money for air-lifting the car in South America and Australia.

Finally, on 9 September, 1989, they were on their way. And from the word go, the Chowdhurys set a remarkable pace. After being flagged off from Delhi by the then sports minister Margaret Alva, the couple drove through seven countries within a period of 38 hours. Day after day the Contessa's speedometer clocked on an average 1000-1,100 km, as the car sped through villages and cities, eating up the miles between countries and continents. An instance of the Chowdhurys' whistle-stop tour: on day 19 the Chowdhurys set off from a remote village in France, Isle d'Abeau at 8 am. By 10.30 am, they had crossed into Switzerland; by 5.30 pm they were in Germany, and at 2 am they finally drove into Baden Baden in the hope that they would get some rest for the night. Unfortunately for them, all the nearby hotels were full and they had to drive for another two hours in the cold, rainy night. The cold and sheer exhaustion forced the Chowdhurys to take refuge in a wayside inn, where they sat for three hours, before hitting the road again at 7 am.

**W**hile comfort took a backseat, it was often officialdom and petty formalities, that resulted in a loss of driving hours. For instance, wherever Air India air-lifted the car, 72

hours had to be set aside as a "cooling off" period when the car would be checked. Nine days were wasted in this manner, while another day was lost due to the 'date-line'. Often, time was wasted during the conversion of currency or, as in South America, during customs clearance. Unforeseen problems, like a strike by the Brazilian customs forced them to change course, and instead of air-lifting the car to Rio de Janeiro from New York, they had to resume the journey from Venezuela. But before that, they tried to enter Argentina, Colombia and Chile but all the Indian embassies advised them against it. In Venezuela too, they were warned that the customs

would hold up the car for at least seven days. But eventually, with the help of a friend—the car was shipped to Caracas by the Venezuelan airline, Viasa—and some bribing down the line, the Chowdhurys were finally on the road.

There were some frightening moments for the couple. And narrow escapes as well. They bypassed Oakland, Santa Cruz and Los Angeles, where an earthquake had brought life to a standstill, by just 10-12 hours, because of a last minute change in course. "We were driving when we heard about the earthquake and the destruction," recalls Saloo. "And we got so nervous that we decided not to drive any further on that day and rested at El Centro."

And as they travelled through 25 countries, the Chowdhurys had a glimpse of many different societies, cultures and people—even though it was a fleeting one—and revelled in certain Indian associations where least expected. A statue of Gandhi in Maracaibo in Venezuela, a chicken preparation which reminded them of the *tandoori* prepared back home, and dozens of delightful vignettes which they will treasure for ever. And after 69 days of driving through six continents, Saloo and Nina Chowdhury returned home—exhausted, but elated. Their dream of making it into the record books had come true but along with the fulfilment, there was also the realisation that "our home planet is wonderful—but tiny" •

*Aditya Chatterjee/Calcutta*

**Says Saloo Chowdhury: "Winning a championship is not the same: every year there is a new champion... We wanted to be the first to circumnavigate the globe"**



*Dick Bass and Frank Wells  
essay the torturous climb  
up the Everest*



DICK BASS



FRANK WELLS



# OVER THE TOP

A sharp crack from somewhere deep in the ice brought me quickly awake. My tent shuddered, and with ear close to the ice I heard the rifle report sound down the deep crevasses, like a hammer blow on a long steel beam, reminding me I was pitched on living ice that was growing, expanding, sometimes cracking.

Then it was quiet. I burrowed in my bag, my eyes open. I could see with gray vagueness the gear around me—boots, climbing equipment, cassette recorder, journal, notebook. I realized it must be nearing dawn. I looked at my watch: 5.30 A.M., May 7.

I thought, Today's the big day. The summit team should already be on their way, weather permitting.

Frank and Dick felt they were ready. Frank had been successful in his effort to create his own summit team separate from Dick's. Dick's team, now consisting of Ed Hixson, Yogendra Thapa (the Nepalese police officer whom Dick and Frank had invited to join the expedition), three Sherpas, and himself, would follow the second team, and then Frank's group would go fourth.

**Crossing a crevasse  
at over 20,000 feet:  
the height of  
enthusiasm and  
adventure**

"I'll go last," Frank had told Ershler, "and I don't want any of the climbers with me, because I don't want to feel responsible for holding anyone back. So number one, I want three strong Sherpas."

"Three!" Ershler had said. "I need every one for hauling loads now. How can I hold three in reserve?"

Ignoring Ershler's rejoinder, Frank continued, "Second, I definitely need a high camp above camp four. Otherwise it's too far for me to go in one day."

"That means hauling a tent, sleeping bags, stoves, fuel, food, sleeping oxygen, all the way to 27,500!"

"Third, I need eight bottles of oxygen: one to sleep on at three, one to climb to four, one



to sleep on at four, one to climb to five, one to sleep on at five, two to go to the summit, and one in reserve for descent."

"Frank, it would be a waste of the Sherpas' efforts to haul all that crap up there before we even know if you are strong enough to get to the Col."

"You worry about getting the equipment up there, I'll worry about myself."

"I tell you what, then. In the morning why don't you and Dick go up to camp three, and let's see how you do."

It was a repeat of Ershler's earlier strategy when he had tested Frank by having him climb through the Icefall, only this time he was certain Frank would have trouble. The next morning Frank and Dick were up at dawn,

intending an early start. But the Sherpa cook was late with breakfast, and it was nearly 8:00 when they finally got away. For the first hour the climbing was similar to the stage between camps 1 and 2, following a trail through the glacier snow from one marker wand to the next, heading toward the back of the cul-de-sac Western Cwm. At the base of the Lhotse Face they had to cross a crevasse where the glacier floor separated from the face. This bergshund was offset so the lip on the face side was much higher than the glacier side, and the lead climbers had propped a ladder over it. Dick was first. At the top of the ladder he took his jumar clamp and clipped it to the fixed rope that led up, then disappeared around a bulge of ice. One step above the ladder and he was on the Lhotse Face proper. He felt

his crampon points bite the hard ice. He splayed his feet in a duck walk, moving one foot, then the next, then sliding his jumar clamp up, feeling it lock when he pulled back on it, then moving his feet again. In a minute he was around the bulge. Looking up he could see the entire face sweeping to the summit of Lhotse 5,000 feet directly above his head. The yellow rope lay on the gleaming ice in a line from one anchor to the next, nearly 2,000 feet connecting him eventually to the tents at camp 3. He couldn't see the tents—they were hidden behind the snow ledge on which they perched—but he knew their approximate location.

Dick had about thirty pounds of supplies in his pack; he had decided that as long as he was going to camp 3, he might as well do

something useful. The wind that had blown most of the night was now abated, and under clear skies he soon had to stop to shed his parka. He carefully removed his pack; if he dropped it here, it would rocket down the steep ice several hundred feet and then no doubt toboggan across the glacier for a few hundred more. When he had the parka stuffed, he put the pack back on. Now he felt he had just the right amount of clothing. This was important to Dick; if he was dressed too warmly, or if some piece of gear was out of adjustment, it created a nagging distraction, one of those negative thoughts that drained him and hampered him from reaching maximum performance.

He slipped into a steady pace, moving one

**Memorial to Marty who never made it; (right) Lou Whittaker evacuates a frost-bitten Larry Nielson: vignettes of the journey**



foot, the other, then sliding the jumar, reciting Kipling and Service. Looking down he could see Frank several hundred feet below, moving slowly.

Considering how little time he had to acclimatize since leaving base camp, Dick was climbing amazingly fast. Soon, though, he began to feel the telltale fatigue of hypoxia, but he was confident he would reach camp 3 with no problem. He wasn't so sure about his partner, as Frank was dropping further behind.

About 1:00 in the afternoon Dick saw the tops of the two tents at camp 3, and in a few minutes he stepped onto the snow bulge that formed a small flat area on the otherwise steep face. He unshouldered his pack, unzipped a tent and sat in the doorway. This was a

**F**rank said: "I've sacrificed a lot for this. But I've figured it was worth it all because it was a dream I've carried now for thirty years"





**The Sherpas performing *puls* before the climb: you need all the help you can get**

**D**ick slid the clamp and pulled back to tighten it on the rope as a balance. One boot up, scrape the rock, step, move the other foot, and balance. The slope eased and he looked up to see the tantalizingly close and awesome upper mass of Everest

room with a view: from his aerie he gazed down the length of the Western Cwm, Everest on the right, Nuptse on the left. Past the mouth of the Cwm he looked down on the summit of Pumori, and beyond, several valleys removed, the massive Cho Oyo, the world's eighth-highest peak.

He found a packet of powdered lemonade to doctor his water bottle, then looked around the tent for lunch. One plastic food bag produced a packet of M&M's and a granola bar, another a handful of mixed nuts, Rye Krisp crackers, and a can of tuna. It wasn't caviar, but to Dick it was a king's feast. With lunch finished, he lay back and took a nap, waking about a half hour later. He looked out, but no sign of Frank. It was time to head back. He strapped on his empty pack, clipped a safety link to the fixed rope, wrapped the rope around his arm and behind his back to brake his descent, walked to the edge of the

**Among the mountains: Frank Wells communes with nature**



platform bulge, and lowered down the forty-five-degree slope.

A hundred yards below camp he met Frank coming up the rope.

"You're not far now, Pancho."

"Don't think I can make it. Too tired, I'm turning back."

Frank rested his arms on his knees. He was breathing deeply and rapidly, and Dick could see the red scarf around his neck was soaked with sweat. Frank had pushed himself as far as he could go.

"Don't worry about it, Frank. We'll just consider this an acclimatization exercise. Next time you'll zoom right up."

"Hope you're right."

At camp 2 Phil Ershler had followed through the telescope Frank's snail's pace up the ropes, and his failure to reach camp 3.

"Two things bother me," Ershler told those standing around the telescope. "First, if we go to the trouble of putting in another high camp, Frank will never get that high to use it. Second, if somehow he does get that high, there's good chance he's going to kill himself."

"He really has no business going above the South Col," one of the others said.

"But I can't tell him he can't go. We all agreed everyone gets a chance on this climb Ershler answered.

"At least we're obligated to tell him how we feel. Maybe we can even talk him out of it."

"I guess it's worth a try," Ershler said. "Let's have a meeting tonight."

Frank and Dick returned late that afternoon, and although Frank was obviously pooped, after a couple hours' rest he seemed recovered, even feisty. Ershler announced a meeting after dinner. Following the meal, then, everyone stayed in the mess tent waiting for Ershler to open the discussion. Looking around, it was easy to spot those on the team who had just returned from the summit. Cracked lips, chapped cheeks, drained faces.

Nielson was the worst. In addition to his general fatigue and his cracked ribs, he had sustained further damage to his already frostbitten feet, so he was planning on descending the next day to base camp. The others on the first team were planning on going down, too.

"Let me start by saying you guys turned in a poor performance today," Ershler told Frank and Dick. "You didn't even get out of camp here until after eight."

"How could we leave on time when the cook sleeps in?" Frank countered.



"That one's hardly our fault."

"Okay, but the fact remains you couldn't get to camp three, and I don't think it makes sense to ask our Sherpas to carry supplies to a camp five if you can't get up there to use them. And that's only half of it. Even more, and I think all the others in the tent here agree with me, if you guys go above the South Col, there's good chance you won't come back. Look at these other guys: Nielson's half-dead, Roach and Jamieson hardly have the strength to get from their tent to here. And these are tough hombres."

Dick winced. He was being included in this critique even though he was sure it was Frank that the criticism was directed at. He decided it would be more politic, though, not to say anything, at least for now.

Frank was also quiet, staring at the makeshift table littered with dinner leftovers, not angry but pensive.

When Ershler was finished Frank looked up, and in a calm voice said, "Fellas, you may not fully understand what this climb means to me. I've sacrificed a lot for this, in terms of

money, job, the strain on my family. But I've figured it was worth it all because it was a dream I've carried now for thirty years. A lifetime dream, to reach the top of Everest, to climb the highest mountain in the world. Now it's even more, it's a double lifetime dream because it's part of the whole Seven Summits. So you fellas have got to keep that in mind, you've got to know that I only want one thing from you, and that's my fair shot at the summit. And now that we've got this far, you just can't pull the rug out. We made a deal at Snowbird. I've volunteered to go last, without any other climbers than the Sherpas."

There was silence, then Ershler said, "We're not trying to make it easier on ourselves. We're saying these things out of a concern for you two. We're saying, Here are two guys who have been very good to us, and we don't want to see them get hurt."

"It's our duty to make you aware just how dangerous it is up there," Nielson added. "If



At a crossing: dangers abound

something went wrong, if a storm came, or you ran out of oxygen, you don't have those years of experience that lets you instinctually get out of a tight spot. And we're afraid if you try to go above the Col, that might happen.

We don't want to take your dream away, but we want you to know how risky it is up there."

"I know it's risky," Frank said, "but I've already considered that. If there's a one in thirty chance I might not come back, I'm willing to accept those numbers."

"I'd say the odds are worse than one in thirty," Ershler said.

Then Ed Hixson spoke. "There's another point, Frank. It's not just yours and Dick's neck, but if either of you do get in trouble, then those who have to go up and attempt a rescue are also at great risk. So there's an overall responsibility here."

"Now we're getting to the heart of the matter," I said, "whether a climber is justified in taking risks when he might be risking the

**Nielson said:**  
**"It is dangerous up there. If anything went wrong, you don't have the experience to instinctually get out of a tight spot"**



lives of those who have to rescue him should anything go wrong."

This question also happened to be at the heart of the controversy surrounding Nielson's decision to push to the summit in spite of illness. Now, perhaps sensing the common ground, Nielson was the first to offer his views in regard to Frank and Dick's case.

"I've already said I feel it's our obligation to make Frank and Dick aware of the dangers, but having done that, I would also say it's their right to take the risks if they choose. After all, it's that right that draws most of us to the mountains—the right to make our own decisions, draw our own lines."

"I agree with that too," Gary Neptune added. "I might be reluctant to go with Frank on his rope, but we all have the right to take our own risks. That's what climbing's about."

To this, everyone nodded agreement. For this, everyone in the tent was drawn to mountaineering. Because of this, everyone found the freedom to measure against the indifferent peaks a personal standard that was theirs and theirs alone.

"Just promise me you'll be careful," Ershler concluded.

"And know we're saying these things because we love you guys," Nielson added. "And we want you to come back."

With everything in place, on May 15 Dick and his group were ready to leave camp 2. Frank gave him a bear hug, and the Sherpas cheered for their good luck as they tied together on a rope for their passage over the crevassed region at the back of the Cwm leading to the Lhotse Face. The weather looked stable: no wind, no clouds.

Dick made good time up the fixed ropes to camp 3, feeling much stronger than he had twelve days before. Arriving in camp, he squeezed in a tent with Hixson and Yogendra, and spread his sleeping bag. Then he arranged his personal gear of extra socks, extra underwear, two types of sun lotion, lip cream, vitamins, personal salves and medicines, a sewing repair kit, backup mittens and goggles, extra hat and hood, Xerox sheets of his favorite poems. We were always chiding Dick about the amount of gear he hauled with him, but he was quick to return our ribbing

whenever any of us asked to borrow something from him.

They woke early next morning to start the long task of melting snow for tea water. Hixson called camp 2. "Hello Phil. Everyone had a good night's rest, and we'll be leaving in an hour. We'll call from the South Col."

"Frank wants to talk to Dick," Ershler said. Hixson handed the radio to Dick.

"Dick, this is Frank. How are you feeling?"

"Like a bull elk smelling the rut. I'm going to charge right to the top of this mother."

"We're all rooting like crazy for you. Remember, if you get this one we'll not only have the Seven Summits but you'll be the oldest man ever to have climbed Everest."

"I'm pushing for all I've got."

Dick finished dressing, then loaded his backpack. Hixson was watching and said, "Dick, you've got too much crap. You'll slow us all down."

"Well, I think I know what I can handle," Dick said.

As he finished packing he thought, I'm going to show this guy once and for all I'm not the weak sister of this group.

Outside the tent Dick clamped his jumars on the fixed rope and left camp, setting a determined pace. It didn't bother him that he had more weight on his back than even the Sherpas; he had convinced himself that a heavy pack was good for his conditioning. Anyway, he planned on summit day to leave most of the extra weight at the South Col; he figured that then his pack, even with the oxygen bottle, would be so much lighter he would feel like he had wings on his heels.

He was almost flying now. Each time he glanced back the distance to the others had increased. For about an hour he lost himself first with thoughts about Snowbird, then with stanzas from *The Cremation of Sam Magee* and *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*.

Soon he was sliding his jumars up the rope as it ascended a rocky outcrop named the Geneva Spur. The altitude was 26,000 feet. Even though he wasn't using any supplemental oxygen, he felt great.

Dick thought, I really am made for this kind of work. If I'd gotten into mountaineering as a young man I might have been world-class with a whole big list of first ascents. But that might have been at the cost of other things, like Snowbird. But if I do make it up tomorrow, it will be like having my cake and eating it too.

He slid the clamp and pulled back to tighten it on the rope as a balance while he moved his feet. One boot up, scrape the rock to find a foothold, step, move the other foot, balance, slide the clamp, pull tight, move the feet again. The slope eased and he looked up to see an easy snow traverse leading to the South Col. And there, tantalizingly close and awesome, was the upper mass of Everest. ●

*Seven Summits* by Dick Bass and Frank Wells with Rick Ridgeway  
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Dick Bass on top of the Everest: a dream come true



BASS & FRANK WELLS  
WITH RICK RIDGEWAY



# Look, no mess!

*But the filth was back at Dharavi once World Bank president Barber Conable made his exit*

**O**peration Whitewash described it best. Three days before Barber Conable was to visit Dharavi, Bombay and Asia's largest slum, to inaugurate the World Bank-sponsored health post at Shastri Nagar, the public health department began cleaning up. The roads that Conable and wife would take were spruced up, gutters unclogged and cleaned, garbage cleared and Dharavi's perpetual sores, (human faeces and stinking sewerage water) momentarily covered with a generous sprinkling of DDT powder and clean gravel.

By 14 March, the day of the Conable visit, the stink was manageable and the sores temporarily covered. And the World Bank president and his wife, accompanied by a posse of public health department officials, and the municipal commissioner, S.S. Tinaiker walked into Dharavi. After the inauguration, Conable had a look around, talked to some of the residents, heard their complaints, and promised them that the health post would now take care of their problems. He visited the local school, his wife took some photographs to show the folks back home, and Conable left, hoping that the health post would help ease the lives of the people at Shastri Nagar.

This health post, part of the World Bank-aided, 48 crore India Population Project-V, that aims at expanding the existing preventive and promotional health care services, is the third such outpost in Dharavi. At its inaugural, Conable said: "We are honoured to con-

tribute, but ultimately, the success of this post depends on you, the full time medical officers and ten volunteers. We help only those who help themselves. Financing is the easiest part of the project. The ten volunteers, who I hope will be dedicated to their jobs, are the heroes of this operation."

But no sooner had Conable left the slum that the mounds of muck were back. One such mound was positioned

right in front of the health post which Conable had inaugurated.

Perhaps, Dr P.B. Malagimani, in charge of the post, can explain it best. "What Conable saw," he admits, "was a total eyewash. They took him to 'prepared places'. All the filth that had to be shifted because of Conable, had to be redumped somewhere, otherwise the residents would revolt. So, some of it was dumped right here in front of the health post. After

Conable left, not one official from the public health department has turned up here. Even the personnel who were supposed to come here to work have not turned up. Besides myself, we need one public health man, four auxiliary female nurses, four multipurpose male workers, one clerk and an attendant. Every health post is supposed to have 'these heroes' as Conable put it. This health post has become a joke with the residents. There is no drinking water. I have to fill buckets of water from the municipal taps. The water stinks because of seepage, and most often, it just does not come. Drinking this water is asking for gastroenteritis, and many other water-related diseases."

Dr Malagimani's two letters to the public health department pleading for help have met with characteristic silence. As the weeks go by, he stares helplessly at the putrefying muck dumped in front of the dispensary.

The school building at Shastri Nagar, which is attached to the health post, is a mute witness to the hypocrisy of the officials. Before Conable visited the school, the building was



**After the inauguration, Barber Conable talked to some of the residents and promised them that the health post would now take care of their problems**



white washed—only the front, though, because that was all he would see.

But dirt and grime is the least of the school authorities' problems. The school has no facilities for drinking water and the children drink the putrid water infected with human faeces. And even the establishment of a health post will not improve matters. "For the last six years," says Dr Malagimani, "this school has had no water. These poor children do not have a choice. Attendance is erratic because of sickness caused by the water and environment. Even the dispensary here run by Dr Tipdi (who is on leave), has no water facility. I have given up the hope of ever getting water here. Perhaps if they had told Conable the truth, something might have happened. Conable should have paid a surprise visit here. I assure you he would have been very, very surprised."

Frustrated and disappointed, Dr Malagimani stays on at the health post hoping for the best and secretly wondering where the money for this project is going. The building that houses the post was already standing, and all that had to be purchased was furniture and whitewash. Dr Malagimani says, "Like the residents here, I am slowly beginning to be wary of the system."

**T**he people of Shastri Nagar are aware of the farce that the officials enacted for Conable. "They fooled that foreigner," says Panchpula Baskar Jadhav, a housewife whose husband works at the Mantralaya. "Instead of starting a health post, they should clean up the gutters and see that we get proper drinking water. They should change the pipes first," she says. "Because of the open drains we have big mosquitoes. My daughter calls them aeroplanes. She is a child, but believe me, they are big ones, and there are thousands of them. First let them change things here and then give our children all those injections." Panchpula has heard of many schemes and programmes meant to make Dharavi a better place to live in. She believes that the health post is just one more plan that will not work. "They say that they are going to help us," she sneers. "They cannot help their own doctor who is at the health post."

Yeshwant Warodwarker, a former mill worker, presently jobless, points to the open gutters. "Look at that," he says, "now when the monsoon comes, they will overflow and this stink will

enter our homes. It happened last year and it will happen again. In most of the houses here the water reaches around four feet. Tell me, what is the use of their health care in these circumstances. You can sail a boat here during the monsoons. We have heard of many promises from people, especially from the politicians. Not one promise has been kept."

One such promise was held out by the then chief minister of Maharashtra, S.B. Chavan. He performed a *bhoomipuja* at Dharavi on 14 April, 1989. This marked the launch of three major schemes, two of which entailed reconstruction of houses and the laying of new main lines for water and sewerage. The Rs 100 crore grant announced by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during the Congress centenary celebrations in Bombay would take care of the finances. A substantial advance from the Prime Minister's grant, received by the state government in 1986-87, had been spent on (among other things) the dredging of the Mithi river bed in the Dharavi-Bandra area, so that sewerage water instead of stagnating, would flow down the Mithi river and into the Arabian Sea. The secretary of housing, D.K. Afzalpurkar, claimed that Rs 2.75 crores had been spent on



**"When monsoon comes, the gutters overflow and stink enters our homes," says Yeshwant Warodwarker**

this project and Chavan promised that he would follow it to the end.

But Chavan was called to New Delhi to take over as finance minister, and that was the end of his involvement. Today, the gutters are still clogged, and sewerage water overflows like it has always done. For the residents, life goes on as it has in the past.

**F**ifty years ago, Dharavi was one huge marshland. A few business men constructed a tannery, hauling





LEONARD AARONS



LEONARD AARONS



**While Dr Alka Karande (left) insists that the three health posts at Dharavi are functioning well, Dr P.B. Malaginani claims the health post at Shastri Nagar has become a joke in the absence of even clean drinking water**

skins to Dharavi from the nearby Bandra abattoir. It was dirty work, and the locals refused offers of employment. The Tamilian supervisors then went to Tamil Nadu and brought back workers from the drought-hit districts. By the late Forties, and early Fifties, the migrant workers began bringing their families with them. Eventually the shanties grew into what is now known as the largest slum in Asia.

The promise of employment in Bombay and the high prices of living

quarters, forced workers and their families into Dharavi. Today, there are approximately four and a half lakh people living there, say government officials. But the figure could easily be much higher. Living on 175 hectares of land, the density of the population is as great as 800 persons per acre in some areas. Dharavi begins from Bandra East and Mahim in north-west Bombay, and ends at Sion in the north-east.

Tired of the hypocrisy of politicians

and of various social organisations, the residents decided to form chawl committees in the early Seventies. But the population kept increasing at an alarming rate and the committees soon gave way before the enormous numbers pouring in.

By the end of 1995, when the World Bank finishes its programme, the estimated slum population of Bombay is expected to hit 65 lakhs. Dr Alka Karande, the deputy executive health officer, admits that they could be fighting a futile battle. She insists, however, that the three health posts at Dharavi are functioning well. And that hopefully things will get better in the future. "We can only try and help," she says. "The influx into Bombay city is around 300 people a day, some land in Dharavi while the others construct huts wherever they can."

Living conditions are terrible, and naturally health problems arise. Each health post looks after 50,000 people. Today, there are 60 functioning health posts in Bombay, including the three in Dharavi. After the World Bank loan was sanctioned in 1988, the state government has been receiving Rs five crores every year. The 45 crore grant in aid will be completed in 1995, by which time there should be around 200 health posts in Bombay. But by 1995 the situation will be so grave that even 200 health posts will be insufficient. And anyway, there is little sense in health care if the environment is in a state of constant decay.

Dr Ramesh Kathuria, the deputy executive health officer of the World Bank-aided project is more optimistic, though. He is positive that the health posts will eventually work wonders for the poor, and insists that his officers and workers regularly visit the various health centres. "They keep coming and going," he says, "making contact every week and filing reports. Let us take Shastri Nagar as an example. Here we want to reduce the natural growth rate by providing pre-natal, natal and post-natal services. We want to reduce the maternal and infant mortality rate, increase the coverage of immunisation, health education on personal hygiene, environmental sanitation and prevention of malnutrition among other things."

Such noble intentions, however, make little sense while Dr Malaginani remains sitting at the Shastri Nagar health post waiting for someone to remember that he has been posted there.

**Godfrey Pereira/Bombay**



**No sooner had Barber Conable left Dharavi that the mounds of muck were back. One such mound was positioned right in front of the health post which Conable had inaugurated.**

**As Panchpula Baskar Jadhav, a resident of Shastri Nagar, says, "They fooled that foreigner"**



**B**aikadilla, Bastar district, Madhya Pradesh. In the universal language of the frontier and the pioneer, this is "God's own country" India's modern pioneers—a profit-hungry government, its state-run forest and mineral corporations, and the wealthy Indians who benefit—have treated it as just that rich, untitled, exploitable

On one side of these mist-shrouded hills is a forest so thick and lush that the mind boggles. Creeper-laden trees tower into the sky, and the undergrowth is choked with greenery. But a five minute climb by jeep, across the ridge, and one enters the world of profit that has restructured the lives of the tribal peoples to whom these hills and forests belonged a mere 30 years ago

On this side is a vast moonscape in which nightmarish machines move and chug, blast and excavate, in a plateau that shines of silver, the Baikadilla iron ore mines. The ore here will last for several 100 years. Its potential dwarfs that of the older mines in the Singhbhum-Keonjhar range in Bihar and Orissa. Since the 1960s this high-quality ore has fed Japan's legendary steel mills, and is today India's largest foreign-exchange earner

Ranchi city, Bihar. This haphazard industrial and commercial city of one million seems worlds away from Baikadilla's sleeping hills. But, according to those who remember this district and this once-popular hill resort, Bastar and Baikadilla, 800 kilometers away, could be like Ranchi in another 20 years of change

The issues of concern are already the same. As in other parts of India's central tribal belt, the peoples who lived in these hills and forests have lost their forests, their lands, their livelihood, and are today impoverished farmers, migrant agricultural and plantation labour or cheap fodder for the industries that have sprung up on their land. But Ranchi, invaded a century-and-a-half ago by outsiders, fired by the ambitions of industry and commerce, is today at a rising boil as the epicentre of the Jharkhand movement, while Bastar, isolated until 50 years ago, only simmers with a streng-



Karkeli village: tribals are upbraided for delaying the construction of a patwari's house

# God's own country

*But land alienation is a truth that the Bastar tribals have to live with*

thening Naxalite movement

British colonial interests and the nearly unchanged economic policies pursued by independent India have been disastrous for the 40 million tribal people—85 per cent of the country's total tribal population—who inhabit the mineral and forest rich ranges that stretch from the Santhal Parganas and the Chhotanagpur plateau in the east, westward to Gujarat, and south to the Dec-

can. The last report of the commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, comments: "The situation in tribal areas is particularly disquieting. The tribal people are continuously losing command over their resources on almost all counts."

The scale and speed of dispossession is matched only by the variety of ways in which the tribals have been

stripped of what belongs to them. Virtually all tribal peoples depend on forests to a great extent, but B D Sharma, commissioner for scheduled castes and tribes since 1986, and a former collector of Bastar district, notes, "the forests are being treated as the state's own property". Colonial forest policies in the mid-19th century restricted customary tribal rights to hunt and use wood and non-wood produce, and instead vested own-





DELHI TRIBES

**Delhi In** Bastar, the most remote of the central tribal districts, the opening of the Bailadilla mines led to the transformation of the 400-people village of Kirindul into an industrial township of 25,000 in the 20 years since 1970.

Other projects planned in Bastar will totally transform the district and its natural environment. Some 20,000 people will be uprooted and 300 sq kms of prime forest land submerged if several hydro-electric projects planned on the Indravati river in south Bastar are built. New iron ore mines to feed the Bhilai steel plant will open up another 50 sq kms of forests in north Bastar. Other projects in the district have already claimed 1,250 sq kms of forest land, including 600 sq kms in the Dandakaranya rehabilitation scheme for East Bengal refugees in the end 1950s.

Larger hydel and thermal power schemes in tribal areas in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra that border on Bastar threaten 1,00,000 people and 1,400 sq kms of good forest and agricultural land. To the north west, the mammoth multipurpose dams being built on the Narmada river will uproot 2,00,000 people, mostly tribals, and drown 1,500 sq kms, one-third of which is good forests. In the Singrauli-Sidhi region of UP and MP vast reserves of coal are making the area "the power capital of India", but at the cost of some 1,50,000 tribals who must make way for the coal-fields which by the end of the Eighth Five Year Plan will cover 180 sq kms.

The opening up of these tribal areas by industry and other large projects has also led to a sharp influx of outsiders who have exploited the local tribals in

many ways, most damningly by cheating them of their land. Such land alienation is a *fait accompli* in the Chhotanagpur areas of Bihar, say most observers, because this region was penetrated more than other tribal areas in both the Mughal and British periods. Despite protective legislation, such alienation continues till today. "There are many danger signals that agricultural land is actually not with the tribals," says S.K. Chand, former tribal welfare secretary for Bihar and now director of research at the Xavier Institute of Social Service in Ranchi. "Yet the government keeps complimenting itself on the grounds that agricultural land has not been alienated."

Bastar has still not seen the type of land alienation that has taken place elsewhere in the region. But commissioner of scheduled castes and tribes B.D. Sharma warns, "Alienation of land has not stopped. Other issues have come up and in some areas these seem to loom larger. In Singrauli, for instance, the impact of the power plants is enormous, but in (nearby areas in the same district) private land alienation is phenomenal. But the land alienation in the state has undoubtedly assumed menacing proportions."

**"W**hy the Jharkhand movement?" Explains Arvind Netam, a third-term Congress party member of Parliament from Bastar and a tribal. "Because the tribals in south Bihar have been totally exploited by outsiders, politically, economically, in every way. It is only after getting educated that they have become conscious of this. The same thing will happen here in Bastar."

According to Netam, the current fate of the central Indian tribal regions is inevitable given the lack of protective legislation that has been applied to tribal areas in the north-east of India. The 6th Schedule of the Constitution, which applies to the north-east tribal regions, empowers tribal district councils to manage land and forests, and to adjudicate in most civil and criminal disputes. This gives the villagers *de facto* ownership of forests and all land. And unlike the central tribal belt, inline restrictions have

ership of the bulk of the forests in the state. These policies were strengthened and enforced after independence. Today over 95 per cent of India's forests are owned by the state, barring forest areas in the tribal north-east. In Bastar, tribals maintain their traditional rights as concessions, today in only one-fifth of the standing forest in the district, the rest is reserved forest owned, administered and policed by the Madhya Pradesh forest department.

Expropriation of tribal land by the government for industries, thermal and hydro-electric power plants, and large irrigation schemes has had a similarly severe impact on the tribals of central India. The tribal districts of Bihar are already heavily industrialised, but the impact of this is increasingly being felt beyond the large urban-industrial areas with the opening each year of new mines and industries right into the hinterland of these districts. Working coalfields in the tribal-dominated south districts of Bihar cover 2,700 sq kms, virtually twice the size of the union territory of

**The scale and speed of deprivation is matched only by the variety of ways in which the tribals have been dispossessed**



protected the north-east tribals from being reduced to a minority by outsiders who come in with the opening up of forests and mineral resources

"I have often said in Parliament that the protection given to the north-east should have been given to central India," says Netam. "The people of that area were more conscious, more educated, and yet they got the maximum protection. Yet nobody will approve this for central India."

Concerned government officials agree with Netam that the protections provided in the 6th Schedule are essential safeguards for all tribal regions. "The fight in the central tribal areas is for self-governance," says B.D. Sharma. "How many flats from Delhi can you go on fighting whether it's the forest acts or other laws. In the 6th Schedule areas there is no forest ranger, no police constable, no *patwari*, no excise collector," says Sharma. "If you remove these four from Bastar, you'll be hailed as a saviour."

In the last four decades, however, successive central governments have uniformly resisted giving these areas greater autonomy. According to Bhupender Singh, former special commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and now director of the Delhi-based Council for Social Development, "There is resistance from the rulers because they don't want to let go of power."

Rather than pay attention to the problems of the tribal areas, central and state governments have continued to play politics. S.K. Chand, earlier Bihar's tribal welfare secretary and deputy commissioner of the tribal-majority Lohardaga district, warns, "We are approaching the Jharkhand problem from our entirely old ways of thinking. One is that the tribal will not protest too sharply if you take away his land and exploit him just short of the point of death. Second, that you pick out the tribals who are likely to agitate and drown them in drink or burn them off."

The frustrations that result from this continued mishandling are evident even in tribal leaders from less volatile areas than south Bihar. "Who will listen?" asks Arvind Netam, the Congress MP from Bastar. "In Bhopal, in Pitna,

**The tribals will be considered civilised when their men wear trousers and their women cover their breasts**



**A timber depot at Narayanpur: consumerism of the cities causes depredation of the**

in all the state capitals they are too busy to pay attention to the interests of the tribals. Take the example of the Jharkhand demand," says Netam. "They are not asking for a separate nation, they are only asking for a separate state or a separate administrative unit. There shouldn't be any difficulty in the government agreeing to this, but it doesn't agree."

That despite growing evidence of the popularity of the Jharkhand demand in the 12 tribal districts of Bihar and in some of the contiguous areas of Orissa, both the central and Bihar government have so far avoided giving greater autonomy to this region or entertained in any serious way the demand for a separate state made up of the Bihar districts that have a large percentage of tribals. Bhupender Singh, member of the central government's committee on Jharkhand affairs, says, "Even this government may not be likely to concede the demand for a separate state because of the repercussions on the Bodoland, Kashmir, Gondwanaland, and Uttarakhand demands. But I believe they will have to give greater

autonomy."

Singh feels that a separate state would serve the interests of tribals in south Bihar. "Such a state would legislate against (the problems of land alienation and land expropriation) and see that the administrative machinery carries this out properly," says Bhupender Singh.

The primary factor that has weakened the case for a separate Jharkhand state for the tribals is that they are no longer in a majority in either the state proposed of the Bihar MP Orissa and West Bengal districts or in the south Bihar districts. This factor of outsiders becoming more numerous than the original tribals is likely to become an explosive issue soon even in remote areas like Bastar, where the population density shot up from 39/sq kms in 1971 to 47/sq kms in 1981 and the percentage of tribals fell from 72.3 per cent to 67.8 per cent in the same period.

The situation in the Jharkhand tribal belt illustrates well that the lack of safeguards against outsiders swamping the tribals is later used to deny the local tribals greater autonomy or a statutory share in power. Curiously enough, neither the concerned government officials nor the Jharkhand movement leaders like Ram Daval Munda or B.P. Kesi have identified when the population figures turned against the tribals of the region. Both





for their pains is that they will be considered civilised when their men wear trousers and their women cover their breasts

In Bastar, the wounds inflicted by the government and exploitative outsiders are still raw. Listen to Chendru, a Muria tribal man in his mid-forties who lives in Garbengal village near the town of Narayanpur. "I don't understand anything. Only the *sarkar* understands," says Chendru. "They tell me one day that the land I live on doesn't belong to me. That I have to pay for it. That the tamarind trees my father planted don't belong to us

often held by a clan or by a village elder. The situation is worse, says Singh, in the many areas where shifting cultivation was practiced and where there is rarely ever written title to the area being cultivated

Both in Bastar and in the south Bihar tribal belt education and training have always lagged behind the industrialisation and opening up of the area. This is unlike the north-east tribal areas where the local people are usually sufficiently educated to protect their land and to take advantage of any economic changes. In the central tribal areas, notes Bhupender Singh, "for every project from Jamshedpur to heavy engineering plants to irrigation projects to townships, tribal land has been acquired through state expropriation. All that these projects have meant to the tribals is that tribal land has been acquired but that the benefits have gone to others."

## ests

groups thus talk in generalities. It is likely that tribals are a slight majority in Ranchi, Singhbhum, Iohardaga, and Gumla districts of Bihar, but not in the other eight districts included in the proposed Jharkhand state. Tribals would be roughly 30 per cent of the population in a state made up these 12 districts. And according to Bhupender Singh, tribals would be in a majority in only Sundergarh and Mayurbhanj districts of Orissa, but not in Keonjhar and Sambalpur, and not at all in the three West Bengal districts of Purulia, Bankura and Midnapur. The two MP districts of Raigarh and Surguja have clear tribal majorities, but most commentators feel that there is little support for the Jharkhand demand here.

**B**astar is likely to go the Jharkhand way. Without any restrictions placed on outsiders settling in the district, today's already-thin tribal majority will be reduced to a minority in another decade or two of industrialisation. As in Bihar, a token number of tribals will be employed as labour and in junior level posts in the industries set up. The vast majority of the local tribals will be impoverished as agricultural land is poor in most of the central tribal belt. All protests, as with the increasingly strong extremist movement throughout the district, will be branded as Naxalite activity and squashed. All that the tribals will get



They say all this land belongs to the government. I don't understand anything. Only the government knows."

In Bastar, the government and its agents are already the oppressors of the people they are meant to "develop" and protect. Armed with laws that make the tribals trespassers on their own land and forests, the forest rangers, police and revenue staff are the exploitative and wealthy *duday* of the region. The administration itself is so far-removed and hierarchical that at best it is paternalistic, at worse an uncaring bureaucracy that impoverishes and oppresses.

Laws and plans made according to the interests of outsiders pay scant respect to the traditional economies of tribal communities or to their interests. Bhupender Singh notes that survey and settlement operations undertaken by the government lead to dispossession of tribal land that is

Statutory reservations in the legislature and in public sector corporations, and even the vast sums of money spent on tribal welfare, have not compensated for the loss of land and forests. B. D. Sharma says, "First you take over his forests and then you say we are going to develop you on a wage of Rs 3 per day."

The 7,000 crores or so expended on tribal development have largely

been spent on administration, notes a Planning Commission report on tribal development in the Seventh Plan period. Worse, tribals, stripped of their land and forests, simply do not have the economic assets to make use of credit, however liberal the terms of lending. In a 1989 study of Bastar district, the MP chapter of the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCI) notes, "There are altogether 150 branches of different banks now swamping Bastar. 1 lakhs of rupees of credit is given every year. The government's part of the expenditure alone came to Rs 5.74 crores last year. But the immediate need is not credit to improve their land but scope to improve it, which is closed by the forest policy and irrigation policy. Indebtedness results. Some of the commercial banks attach their property. A study of Kondagaon, in 1976-1981, established that of the 499 farmers who received



loans from the Land Mortgage Bank, 476 people lost their cattle or land because of their inability to pay back. The point about these programmes is not that they generate corruption, which they do, but that they generate poverty and landlessness."

**F**orest laws set up by the British and continued in independent India, and laws that allow tribal land to be expropriated without due reason or adequate compensation, are in fact unconstitutional, notes Chhatrapati Singh of the Indian Law Institute in New Delhi. "The forest department in India is nothing but another kind of *zamindari*," says Singh. "The policing and penal powers given to the forest department here have not been given anywhere else in the world. There are two penal codes in India: one for forest dwellers, one for citizens." Singh notes that the Forest Act does not differentiate between cognisable and non-cognisable offences and thus makes "all offences concerning the forest and its produce" grounds for arrest. Under the Indian Penal Code only offences that threaten injury to an individual or to the state are grounds for arrest.

"Evidently, with legislation pertaining to the forests, the reason behind limiting liberties and enacting a different type of criminal law is other than grave danger to people or the security of the state," says Singh. "The reason for the British was clearly to facilitate the economic exploitation of forest resources through coercion and deceit. In so far as Indians continue with these laws and procedures, the reason cannot be different."

Singh also points out that land cannot be appropriated by the government without first meeting universal principles of equity. "As the situation stands today in India," says Singh, "if the construction of a dam results in the submergence of common forest land, as invariably happens, dwellers are asked to vacate and some meagre compensation is given them in lieu. But here issues concerning compensation and the scientific worth of the project tend to submerge the central point about the just distribution of benefits." According to Singh, the

requirements of socialist principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution require that at a minimum the displaced get sufficient hydro-electric power for their needs.

This is echoed by B D Sharma, who notes, "The persons who have been deprived of a resource they depend on should come first. But today they are ousted and given a few rupees. This inequity must stop."

S K Chand, the former tribal welfare secretary of Bihar, notes, "If industrialisation is to take place, it will take place from the mineral-rich areas, which are the tribal areas. But the question is when the government is taking land, it is taking the only means of a stable income of poor people and is morally bound to see that the poor person is not harmed. But the government earlier gave a pittance as compensation and that too

you. This is a warped method of development. Dams mean not drinking water but destruction of fields cultivated for 2,000 years. There is out-migration from here because of poverty yet hundreds of people flow in here to get affluent."

These ironies are inescapable in Bastar too where the government enforces inappropriate and impoverishing policies with the excuse that the tribals must be "developed" and must be "brought into the national mainstream." The irony of a corrupt and inefficient public works department teaching the tribals sanitary living escapes the government, or that of a hierarchical and moribund administration teaching the tribals democracy.

The local tribals' resistance to being force-fed plans that do not benefit them is dismissed by government officials on grounds that are very



**Muria tribals at Garbengal: the administration dismisses them as habitual drunks**

clearly racist. "Tribals are lazy and drunks according to all senior and junior government officials—let alone the traders and businessmen who exploit the tribals—in Bastar and elsewhere. In the forested village of Palli, 50 kilometres off the main road from the town of Kondagaon in Bastar district, local revenue officers shouted "*Pivo aur pivo*," and "We are going to get labour from outside", at inebriated tribals who had delayed building a

house for a *patwari* to be permanently posted in their village. But in the nearby village of Maidapal the tribal *sarpanch* says clearly, "We want roads, and sometimes doctors. But we don't want police *chowkis* or the *patwaris*."

The story is the same everywhere in the tribal areas. Ramdayal Munda, the Jharkhand movement leader, says, "There is overwhelming ethnocentrism in a model which only sees tribes as imperfect or yet to evolve versions of Hindu society and there is great anti-tribal bias in a model which criticises tribes as ignorant, childish and backward because they will not cooperate and follow a path outlined for them by unsympathetic outsiders... The tribes have their own ideas about the direction they would like their development to take." ●

**Siddharth Dube/Bastar and Ranchi**



# Sounding the board

*Players take on Indian Hockey Federation officials*

**"T**he Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) have combined to ruin Indian hockey," said a former player, commenting on the formation of the Association of Indian Hockey Players, which decided to boycott selection trials held recently in preparation for the Beijing Asian Games. All the leading players of the country have been excluded from the initial selection itself.

The player, who wished anonymity, felt the players were being pushed into such a corner by the federation that they had to protect their interests by forming an association and demanding its recognition by the IHF.

Trouble was brewing for a long time. The IHF had selected a team for the World Cup in Lahore and then dropped nearly the whole side for the subsequent Indira Gandhi Gold Cup competition held in Lucknow. This was the beginning of the latest round of feud between players and officials.

Then came the announcement that there would be "open trials" for the selection of the Indian squad for the Beijing Asiad to be held in September. Initially, there was confusion over the term "open", which was later clarified to mean that all players recommended by their respective state associations could attend the camp. The trials were held in Delhi over three days from 17 April.

The leading players of the country—32 of them selected for the Lahore and Lucknow competitions—formed an association and demanded that the IHF redress their grievances. Only then would they join the selection camp, their spokesman, World Cup captain Pargat Singh, said.

IHF president Raghunandan Prasad reacted very strongly. "We will not

submit to any blackmail by the players," he stated. "There cannot be unions in the playing field. We will maintain discipline at any cost. Lack of discipline has been the main reason for India's debacles in hockey."

On the third and last day of the trials, Pargat and other members of the players' association met Prasad. But the problem was not resolved as each side refused to budge from its position. While Prasad maintained that he had given a 7 pm deadline to the players to report on the field, Par-

assess the potential of the players.

The IHF had originally decided to select 40 players for an initial camp, after which the number was to be pruned to 26. A little before the proposed participation of the Indian team in the BMW competition in Holland, the final 14 was to be named. But, after the row with the players, everything seems uncertain. For example, players like Patterson, Jagbir and even Thorba Singh, whose names were not included by the Bengal Hockey Association in the list of players recommended by it to the IHF, would naturally be included sometime in the future.

Whatever the final composition of the team, India will fare very poorly because the leading players have been excluded. While stating this clearly, former Olympic captain Gurbux Singh said, "I don't see why the senior players refused to join the camp. If they felt they were better than the rest, it should have provided them even more reason to attend. But it is only fair to give every talented player a chance. Way back in 1958 there were players who were



**Pargat Singh (second from left) : leading the revolt**

gat denied knowledge of any such ultimatum, especially about the trials being extended by a day if they reported.

However, on the last day of the trials, eight of the players who had decided to boycott the camp, reported for the workout. They were Ajit Lakra, Vijay Kujur, goalkeeper Subbarah, Gundeep Kumar, Abdul Aziz, Nagennder Singh, Subodh Khandekar and Jagdeep Singh. In addition, Mark Patterson and Jagbir Singh had sent letters explaining their absence.

A total of 125 players attended the camp. National coach Udham Singh—over whose appointment there was a hue and cry—did not attend the trials owing to personal reasons. SAI representative Balkishen Singh was also absent. But seven selectors were there to

tried out after the initial lot were given a workout. There is no harm in trying out new players.

"I don't know the details of the demands made by the players. But if their grievances are genuine, they should tackle it in a straightforward manner by meeting IHF officials and thrashing out the issues directly. They should not have used the demands to boycott the trials. After all, it is the IHF which will have the final say."

The players' association in a letter to Prasad alleged that the players who won the Indira Gandhi Gold Cup were not given their pocket money, at the rate of 10 dollars a day for eleven days (since this was an international tournament) and were not supplied with their kit when the tournament started. They also demanded among



other things, the grading of all-India tournaments, payment of first class train fare and Rs 100 as DA per day for all-India level competitions. They also felt that the number of tournaments for the leading clubs and players should be curtailed so that the players get some rest. For the same reason, they advocated coaching camps of shorter duration. The last demand was for benefit matches for players in need and for those who were on the verge of retiring.

**T**he demands have met with the approval of all sports-minded people in the country. It is a fact that hockey does not generate the kind of money players in many other disciplines receive. And, after years of serving the country, there should be something more than just honour and fame that the players could fall back on. And, in order to continue playing to their potential, players should not be asked to wield the stick almost throughout the year as at present.

The appointment of players like Inam-ur-Rahman as official has also irked current and former players



**R. Prasad: taking a firm stand**

alike. Inam was suspended four times in his career—a record that should have prevented him from having anything to do with infusing discipline in Indian hockey. And yet, he was sent as an observer to Pakistan for the World Cup. Moreover, the appointment of Udham Singh as coach has also not been received kindly. Udham,

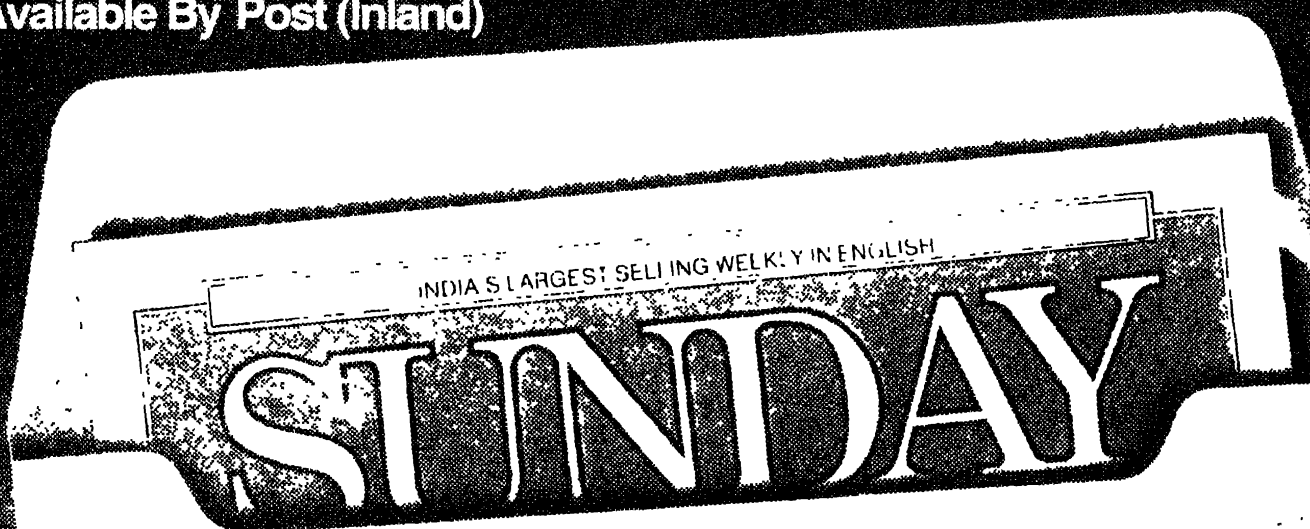
was a great player in his day, but he has been out of touch with hockey for a long time and has had no experience whatsoever on artificial surfaces.

The constant rivalry between the IHF and the SAI has also had an adverse effect on Indian hockey. Time and again, policies have been thrust upon the IHF by SAI, for the latter holds the purse-strings. M. P. Ganesh came in as India's coach at SAI's behest. It was only natural that the IHF made things difficult for him, until he himself decided to quit. Udham Singh may, at best, be a compromise choice, though SAI has still to give its green signal on his appointment.

With all such wranglings going on, Indian hockey is suffering. The BMW tourney is in mid-June and the Asian in September. There is virtually no breathing time, because at least the nucleus of a team should have been formed by end-March at the latest. But, thanks to the tussle between the players and officials, hockey is in the doldrums. And at a time when the standard of the game in India has probably reached its nadir.

**Arijit Sen/ Calcutta**

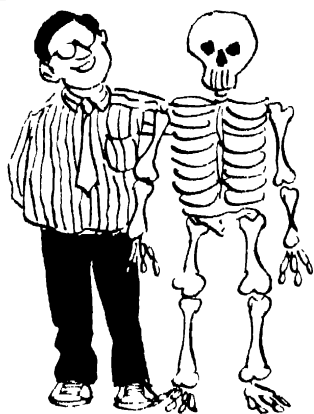
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## A touch of glass

■ Human skeletons made of fibre glass? Incredible though it may sound, it is not a line from a futuristic science fiction. Or so says Amitabha Sengupta, a local architect from New Delhi. It all began four years ago when Sengupta decided to turn his attention to his first love—medical science. Years of painstaking effort paid off and he was recently able to float a company—aptly named *Ben Trovato* (Italian for well-invented) which churns out 15 to 20 skeletons each month. These were on display last week at the Pragati Maidan in New Delhi during the course of the Medicare

Exhibition. Ever since, Sengupta has been flooded with letters from interested parties both from India and abroad. He is reluctant, however, to sell his invention to traders, and would like to concentrate instead on medical institutes, universities, schools and organisations like the Red Cross.

At the moment, he refuses to divulge the secret behind his creation, claiming that even his five assistants do not know the 'secret'. But there is hope yet, for, he says, "I will tell the world some day."

## A warm welcome

■ With a view to filling its coffers, the Indian government is taking a number of steps to increase the volume of foreign tourists to the country. Some of the proposed measures will include easy availability of visas, landing permits for 30 days at all international airports in the country, and lifting restrictions on photography says Manish Bahl, secretary

of tourism. Calling the industry "an instrument of economic growth", Bahl declared, that India would like to increase its share in the international tourism industry which has a total financial involvement of around Rs 200 billion. This should gladden all prospective foreign tourists, and regulars too, who have faced problems in the past.

gaily painted

All these aircraft, participating in the World Vintage Air Rally, reached Calcutta on 17 April on their way from London to Brisbane. The fleet of old aircraft, included such models as Beach Craft Bonanza, Piper, Cessna and Fairchild which were built between 1942 and 1950. The rally included 18 participants from many



Vintage models at the Calcutta airport

## In transit

■ Calcutta's Dum Dum airport presented a strange picture. For, in the middle of so many Airbuses and Boeings were 11 old aircraft, which looked completely different from today's slick models—they were infinitely smaller and

countries including Australia, England, USA and Zimbabwe.

The 18,000 km race which began on 25 March will be completed in six weeks. During the brief stop-overs in India, the pilots were enchanted with the warm reception that they received.

# THIS INDIA

**KAKINADA:** Villagers of Govindapuram in East Godavari district forcibly extracted five teeth each from three persons, whom they suspected of practising witchcraft. The three were tied to an electric pole and their teeth removed when they were returning from a film. According to reports, the victims were admitted to a hospital. The police have arrested three persons in this connection—*The Hindustan Times* (O.P. Bajaj, Jabalpur)

**NASIK:** A man suffered burns when he was physically lifted and thrown into the funeral pyre of his wife at Yaval, in Jalgaon district. Reports say that the victim, Umakant Chaudhary's wife, Pushpa died due to exten-



ILLUSTRATIONS: DEBASIS DEB

sive burns from a stove which caught fire. When the funeral pyre of Pushpa was lit, her brother, Bhagwan in a fit of rage, pounced on Umakant and threw him into the fire as he suspected him of having burnt his sister—*The Times of India* (A.K. Guha, Nasik)

**MADRAS:** What would one normally expect when a snake bites a man? If the serpent was a poisonous one, then the person would die. But, a few days back, a 45 cm-long banded krait, got killed when the 27-year-old man it bit, while he was asleep, suddenly rolled over and crushed the reptile under his weight. The man woke up and found the snake lying dead while he had swellings in different parts of his body—*The Hindu* (M.V. Prasad, Madras)

**JAMMU:** A three month-old infant was allegedly drowned by his father who believed that the child brought him bad luck. The police said that the man had confessed to the murder—*The Tribune* (H.K.L. Gandotra, Jakolari)



BEGINNING 29 APRIL 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



This is a week of excellent prospects. Most of you are advised to check extravagance. Only then will you be able to save money for the future. The time is right to forge ahead. Do not hesitate to ask a friend for help.

**Good dates:** 29, 30 and 5

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



For lovers, this is a good week. The period is not favourable for those in service. Be careful in your dealings with members of the opposite sex. Children will be a source of joy. Take care of your health.

**Good dates:** 1, 3 and 4

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3 and 5

**Favourable direction:** West

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



Be careful of your health. Try not to overstrain yourself. The weekend will be hectic for you. Friends and relatives will be of great help. Also, you are likely to gain through speculation.

**Good dates:** 30, 2 and 3

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** South

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



You might have to undertake a journey which will in turn solve one of your pressing problems. You will come across people who will be of immense help to you. A good week for romance and matrimony.

**Good dates:** 1, 4 and 5

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 7

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



This is a fairly good week for you. Those on the lookout for a job may find one. Those in service may look forward to a promotion or a transfer. The time is not ripe for speculation. You may have to incur some losses.

**Good dates:** 29, 2 and 4

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 6

**Favourable direction:** East

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



A sudden turn of events will not only take you by surprise, but will be the beginning of a new phase in your life. Businessmen will strike new deals which will be profitable in the long run.

**Good dates:** 30, 1 and 3

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 7

**Favourable direction:** North

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



Provided you are extremely cautious, this week promises to be reasonably favourable. The professional front will throw up several opportunities, which if utilised, will help you win the praise of your superiors.

**Good dates:** 3, 4 and 5

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 7

**Favourable direction:** South

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



An excellent week for romance lies ahead of you. You will be in a position to make the proposal you have in mind. For those in business, a week of lucrative deals and contracts is forecast.

**Good dates:** 2, 3 and 4

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



Courage and fortitude will see you through your problems this week. Do not be unduly worried for the tide will soon turn in your favour. Businessmen will face a few problems.

**Good dates:** 29, 1 and 3

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



You might have to undertake an important journey which you have been avoiding for a long time. On the whole, a fairly good week for you. Those in service will gain promotions or transfers.

**Good dates:** 30, 4 and 5

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 6 and 9

**Favourable direction:** East

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



An important change in your career is forecast. Businessmen can forge ahead with business deals. Those in service will be awarded promotions. Family members will prove helpful. Take care of your health.

**Good dates:** 1, 2 and 3

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 9

**Favourable direction:** West

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



This is an important week for professionals. You can go ahead with the changes you want to make. A lot of socialising lies ahead of you. The time is not right for matrimony. Keep in touch with your friends.

**Good dates:** 2, 3 and 5

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 8

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—CANCER

*Both the partners might find it difficult to continue the relationship. The Libran woman is in need of mental stimulation which is not provided by the Cancerian man. It will require a lot of determination on the part of the two partners to make a success of this relationship. ●*



## Playing peace-maker

How did the much talked about differences between Karnataka chief minister Veerendra Patil and Congress party president Rajiv Gandhi achieve resolution? Take a bow, party trouble-shooter Rajesh Pilot. The former minister for surface transport spent a couple of hours closeted with Patil in Karnataka Bhavan. And before you could say Chikmagalur, had the chief minister purring like a pampered tom cat.

A happy compromise has now been affected between Patil, who insists that the task of ministry formation is his and his alone, and



**Rajesh Pilot: mission of peace**

Gandhi, who was awfully keen that S. Bangarappa (the CM's arch rival) find a place in the Cabinet. But just how happy that compromise is can only be computed when the Karnataka chief minister "restructures" his ministry.

## No favours required

First, he tangled with technocrat Sam Pitroda. And now, communications and surface

HEARD AT THE CPI(M) OFFICE

**What do you call Devi Lal when he turns communist? Tau Tse Tung.**

A PARTY WORKER

transport minister K.P. Unnikrishnan has run foul of senior bureaucrat and chairman of the Nhava Sheva Port Trust, Anna Malhotra.

The minister apparently summoned the chairman (who is married to the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, R.N. Malhotra) to his office to discuss the penalty of Rs 1.5 crores that the trust had imposed on a foreign construction company engaged in build-

ing the port. Unni wanted Malhotra to waive the penalty, even though the company had delayed construction. Malhotra refused to oblige.

Then, Unnikrishnan played what he thought was his trump card. He'd been thinking of granting her an extension, he told Malhotra.

That's not what we're here to discuss, the bureaucrat informed him tersely. And anyway, she

JAGDISH YADAV



**K.P. Unnikrishnan: now, for bureaucrats**

added, she wanted no such favours from the minister.

Unni is still trying to figure out just where he went wrong.

## THERMOMETER

*All the Janata Dal dissidents*

■ **Chandra Shekhar:** The Dal's chief sulker, he has come out openly against the government with his *Illustrated Weekly* interview. His view of the matter is that the government will fall under the weight of its own sins. However that might turn out, there's no denying that it's tottering under Shekhar's phone-tapping charges.

■ **Yashwant Sinha:** Is a dissident by virtue of being in Chandra Shekhar's camp, but fights shy of tearing into the government too aggressively. Is an effective cheer-leader, though, and graces the sidelines at every Dal slanging match.

■ **Ram Dhan:** One of the most prominent members of the Jan Morcha, this Harijan leader is among the most vocal critics of the Raja's *sarkar*. Every meeting of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party resounds with his diatribes against the actions of the V.P. Singh ministry.

■ **Hari Mohan Dhawan:** Dal MP from Chandigarh, he has clashed with the government on the law and order issue. At the last Dal parliamentary party meeting, had heated exchanges with the Raja over the bomb blast in Batala.

■ **Hukum Deo Yadav:** One of the foremost critics of the government, the price rise has this Bihar MP all worked up. He was so carried away by his rhetoric at a recent Dal meeting that he refused to let finance minister Madhu Dandavate and Nathu Ram Mirdha explain the cause of the recent increase in prices.

■ **Ram Jilal Suman:** This Harijan MP from Uttar Pradesh has been opposed to the Raja from the very beginning. Takes on the government for its inaction in instances of atrocities on the backward classes.

## Musical chairs

Humility is catching, and the bug has now travelled into the ranks of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But, like the Raja, BJP members also put on the oh-we-are-so ordinary facade only in full view of the public.

Their latest such positive-publicity drive took place in a Calcutta-bound special aircraft. No sooner had party leaders boarded the plane when member of Parliament Jaswant Singh and Madhya Pradesh chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa dashed towards the economy section.

Once ensconced in their seats, the duo sat tight until the aircraft took off, while Patwa's security guard occupied pride of place in the executive class. But all that changed once the plane was airborne. Plans of travelling cattle class were hurriedly junked as Jaswant Singh and Patwa scurried to the relative comfort of the front of the aircraft.

And the unfortunate security guard was relegated to the rear.



## Survivors

Some Governors are, obviously, more equal than others. Or why would the Dal government refuse to accept the resignations of Khursheed Alam Khan and Ram Krishna Trivedi, the Governors of Goa and Gujarat, respectively?

Apparently, Khan stuck on because the Raja thought it politic not to remove a Muslim from an important post at this juncture. After all, the community is already disenchanted with the government.



**Khursheed Alam Khan:** clinging on

R K Trivedi, on the other, survived because of his "connections", his son-in-law is a good friend of Bhure Lal's.

## The lady's in a hurry

There's money trouble again at the environment ministry. The allocation for the Ganga Action Plan has yet to come through and (you're quite right!) Maneka Gandhi is hopping mad.

This time it's not Bimal Jalan who's at the receiving end. The other Mrs Gandhi's wrath is directed at secretary planning commission, P.V. Krishna Swami.

HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

**Dekha, Kashmir ne Punjab se gold medal chheen liya! (Kashmir has snatched away the gold medal from Punjab).**

A JANATA DAL MP



**Maneka Gandhi:** tearing into Chimanbhai Patel (right)

who was handed out a public dressing-down recently for his non-action.

Next on the Maneka hit list is Gujarat CM Chi-



manbhai Patel. On a get-well-soon visit to her injured fellow-minister Arif Mohammad Khan, Gandhi tore into Patel in the pre-

## BAROMETER

*Who calls the shots at the external affairs ministry*



**Muchkund Dubey:** With S K Singh becoming a casualty of the St Kitts affair, Dubey has taken over as foreign secretary. A man of unimpeachable honesty and integrity he can be expected to hold his own against the political pressures that will come to bear upon him.



**Ronen Sen:** Effectively ran the ministry in the Rajiv era, and even now this joint secretary briefs the Prime Minister on various international issues. Has maintained good relations with the new foreign secretary and this should stand him in good stead.



**Prakash Shah:** A joint secretary in the ministry he had acquired a measure of importance during the Rajiv Raj, only to be marginalised once the Raja took over. The induction of Dubey, however, will lead to his rehabilitation.



**Kuldeep Sahdev:** He is regarded as Muchkund Dubey's man, and as such, is bound to do well now that his mentor has taken over as foreign secretary.



**N. Krishnan:** His isolation within the ministry is very nearly complete. What makes matters worse for this special envoy of the Prime Minister for the Africa Fund is that the importance of his assignment has decreased after the release of Nelson Mandela.

sence of several newsmen and government officials. The chief minister, said the lady, was in the pay of a leading textile tycoon.

## Fly-by-road

Paranoia seems to characterise all security set-ups. And the one surrounding our esteemed Prime Minister is no exception to this rule.

Despite the public noises to the effect that he was dismantling the security network established by Rajiv, the Raja persisted with the regulation that had that no private aircraft could fly into or out of the Safdarjung Airport, adjoining the prime ministerial residence (only in a matter of speaking, you understand). Overflying private planes, the argument went, would put the head of government's life into jeopardy.

Fair enough. But what was to be done about the aircraft belonging to Delhi Gulf, which had done its maximum flying hours, and was now due for maintenance checks. It had landed at Palam Airport, but its hangar was at Safdarjung. How was the plane to journey to its resting place?

Elementary, said the Raja's securitywallahs: it could travel by road. So the helicopter was secured to a jeep, and began its journey down Sardar Patel Marg, Akbar Road and...well, we suppose you get the idea, while the police stood guard along the route. The hapless owners of the aircraft took out a massive insurance policy on the craft before it began its journey, to cover the eventuality of damage.

The distance which would have been covered in five minutes by air, took all of three hours by road.

But then, what are a few hours between the Raja and his people. ●



# BURTON

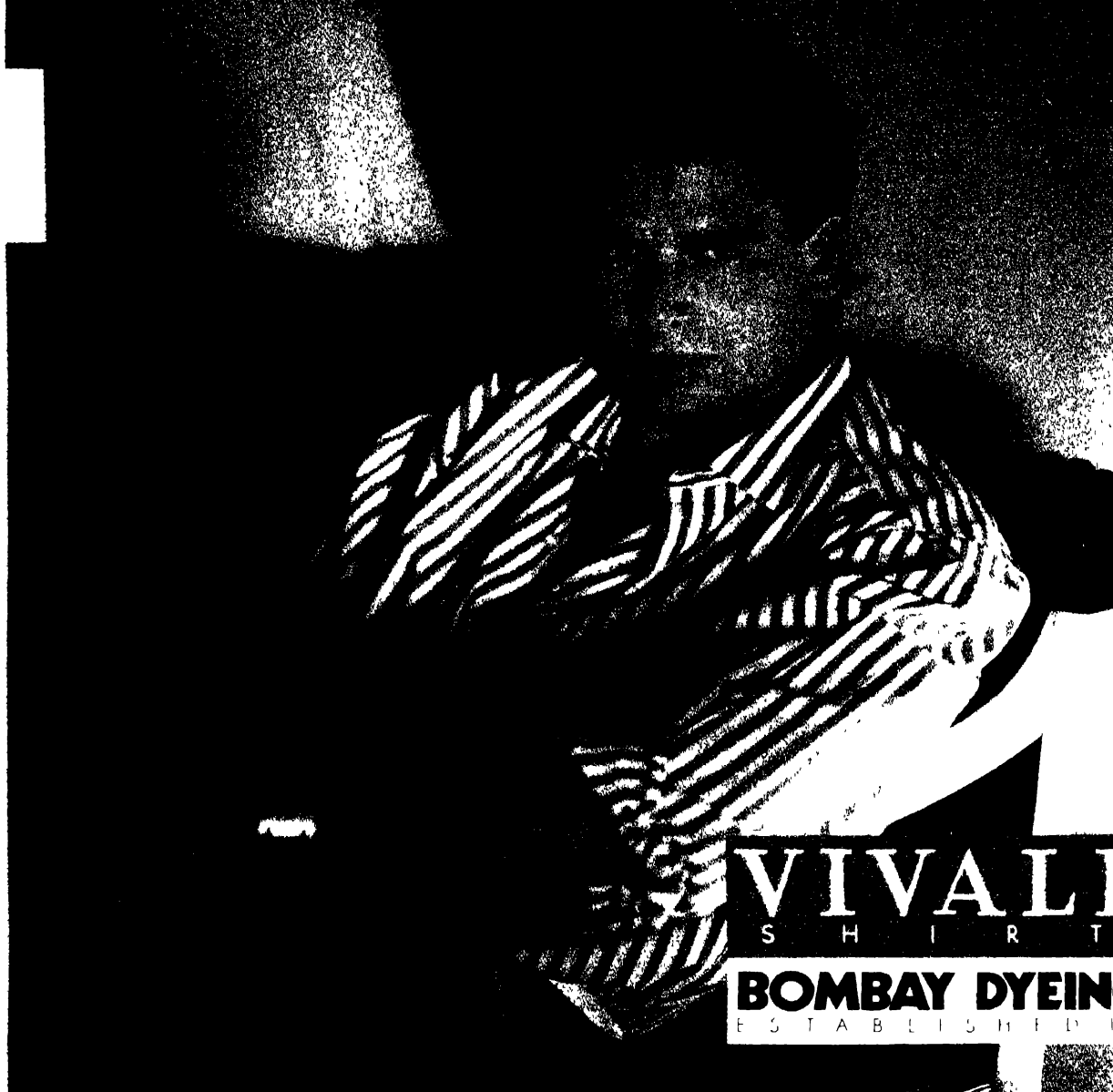
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**NEPAL: BLOOD IN THE STREETS**

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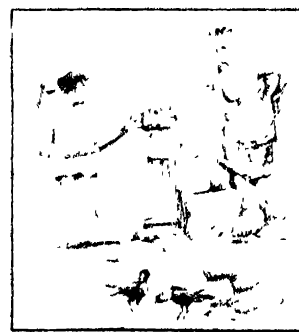
And now, domestic sneaker chic with adidas, Puma and Lotto.

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## Attacking Ambani

**C**an Ambani survive? (15-21 April) traces the tug of war between V P Singh and Dhirubhai Ambani for Larsen & Toubro. The practice of taking revenge (after a change of government) is nothing new, it is prevalent all over the world. But the National Front government

■ Dhirubhai Ambani's days at Larsen and Toubro are over. After V P Singh became the Prime Minister, it was obvious that it would only be a matter of time before L&T was attacked. While I can't help but feel sorry for Ambani, I hated the manner in which the take-over tycoon had been taking over one company after another only because he has power.

**Shyamal Bhadra, Calcutta (West Bengal)**



**Dhirubhai Ambani; (above) V.P. Singh: at loggerheads**

seems obsessed with the idea of persecuting the favourites of Rajiv Gandhi. This seems to be V P Singh's way of convincing the electorate that he will fulfil the promises he made to them. But isn't the electorate more worried about the Kashmir problem than concerned whether the PM has fulfilled his promises or not?

**R.K. Gulati, Siliguri (West Bengal)**

## Beyond repair

**K**ashmir burns and all that the government can do is to wring its hands in helplessness. (*The fire inside*, 25-31 March) There is no cohesive policy, no game plan to effectively combat terrorism in the state. The Opposition too seems powerless to provide a solution to the problem. Attitudes are hardening

with little hope of peace in the near future. Under the circumstances the BJP appears to be the only political party to have come up with plausible steps to tackle the issue. The only way to stop the violence and the mindless killings is to destroy the terrorist camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, to annul article 370 of the Constitution (so as to prevent Kashmiris from taking advantage of the special favours accorded to them under that section of the Constitution), and to consciously encourage non-Kashmiris and non-Muslims to settle down in the Valley. We may initially pay the price of a war with Pakistan with escalation of violence and loss of more lives, but this price has to be paid if normalcy is to be restored to the state. But does the National Front government have the courage to do that? If not, it is time Advani or Vajpayee was invited to put an end to this senseless violence, once and for all.

**Duke Walla, New Delhi**

■ The continuous curfew for the past five months has turned the people of Kashmir into a curfew hardy species. They seem to have grown quite immune to the difficulties caused by such a long curfew. While it has hardly helped the Governor to curb the activities of the militants it has only alienated him from the common masses more and more. This has resulted in increasing their support for the militants (mujahideens). The various measures taken by the government of India (which largely seem the result of sheer frustration) like displacement of the local bureaucracy by "centre-chosen" candidates, posting of a huge army in the Valley, the extension of profuse sympathy to the refugees from Kashmir, the ruthless beating and rounding up of innocents, and

finally the undignified treatment meted out to women, have turned the people of the Valley furiously anti-Indian. These policies have damaged the situation beyond repair.

**Bradshaw, Malda (West Bengal)**

## Rebel leader

**T**he interview with Kashmiri woman militant leader Aasiyeh Andrabi (*Don't sit silent*, 1-7 April) made us hang our heads in shame. On the one hand the treatment meted out to the women demonstrators by the CRPF is abominable to say the least, and on the other the blatant pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian stance adopted by Aasiyeh Andrabi in the interview was shocking. It seems the situation in Kashmir has reached a point of no return. And it is a shame that the government at the Cen-



**Andrabi: anti-India stand**

tre is still under the illusion that the problem in Kashmir is simply a law and order problem.

**B.R. Sampath Kumar, Mysore (Karnataka)**

## Baseless

**S**imranjeet Singh Mann is absolutely correct in his assumption that there is no hope left (*On the knife edge*, 8-14 April). It is obvious that there is less hope





### Mann: tall claims

for him than for Punjab Mann's outbursts even put loudmouths like Mani Shankar Aiyar, Devi Lal, Kalpnath Rai, Om Prakash Chautala and K. K. Tewari to shame. How can Mann guarantee peace in Punjab, simply on the basis of such baseless claims that "the boys" will no longer indulge in terrorist activities. Under the circumstances, what Punjab needs are strong measures to curb the terrorist activities. Just tall claims will not suffice.

Samir Marx Mahajan, New Delhi

### Breath of fresh air

The story was interesting and the photographs impressive (*Return of romance*, 15—21 April). However, one cannot agree with the idea that the entire credit for the success of *Maine Pyar Kiya* goes to director Sooraj Barjatya, and the lead pair, Salman Khan and Bhagyashree. It is true that the director has done a superb job in his maiden venture and the stars too have contributed largely to the film's success by their refreshing performances but that does not in any way undermine the role played by Laxmikant Berde, the comedian of the film. Berde (who incidentally also made his debut in Hindi films with *Maine Pyar Kiya*) has given a very fine performance in this film and deserves a fair

share of credit now that it is a mega-hit.

Md. Masoom Akhtar, Calcutta (West Bengal)

At a time when the video boom is sounding the death toll of the Hindi film industry, it is heartening to find that *Maine Pyar Kiya* is drawing full houses at the theatres. While Sooraj Barjatya and the lead pair, Salman Khan and Bhagyashree need to be congratu-

nalists being appointed as ambassadors and high commissioners (*Mission to London*, 25—31 March). Kuldip Nayar's appointment as the Indian high commissioner to London will certainly be hailed by his fellow journalists in particular, and all Indians in general, as the triumph of honest journalism. In one of the largest democracies of the world where the



A scene from *Maine Pyar Kiya*: love in the air

lated for the film's success, one cannot forget the contribution of Ram Laaxman, the film's music director. It is the *Dil diwana bin sajna ke* number which has taken the audience by storm. As *Maine Pyar Kiya* has rightly indicated, it's romance time again.

Harekrushna Mahanta, New Delhi

### Time for celebration

In a world where the importance of the media is universally acclaimed, it is not surprising to find jour-

Nayar: winning laurels



nalists being appointed as ambassadors and high commissioners. It's time we had some sincere and honest diplomats as ambassadors instead of corrupt politicians or cunning bureaucrats.

It is most appropriate, therefore, that another prominent journalist, M. V. Kamath, welcomed this news by saying that it is a recognition of the work of all Indian journalists and their service to the nation. As long as the press is treated with dignity and granted total liberty, democracy will exist in this world.

Shiroang J. Godbole, Pune (Maharashtra)

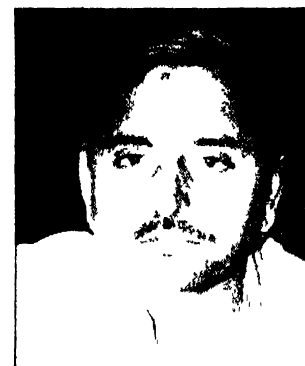
### The language issue

The comments of UP chief minister (Mulayam Singh vs everybody, 8—14 April) on banning the use of English (to reduce corruption!) re-

minds us of the famous words of Theodore Roosevelt, former president of the United States of America, "A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a University education, he may steal the whole railroad." In other words, *hum sab chor ham*—each according to our capabilities. It is obvious that Yadav thinks he can do away with corruption by destroying the factor that causes it—education. This seems to be the only explanation for his decision.

R.N. Vaswani, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Mulayam Singh's crusade against English is ridiculous to say the least. It exposes his own inferiority complex. In a country which has so many diverse languages, English acts as a link—it is not the "white man's burden" we are carrying! Yadav's move is purely a vote-oriented poli-



### Yadav: no to English

cy. He seems hell bent upon isolating UP from the rest of the country.

The chief minister's decision to close public schools and convents is a ludicrous one. Why doesn't Yadav think of raising the standard of government schools instead of coming up with such weird ideas? Hindi has been rejected in the south in no uncertain terms and this move will only lead to future problems because there will be no link language.

P.N. Banerji, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)





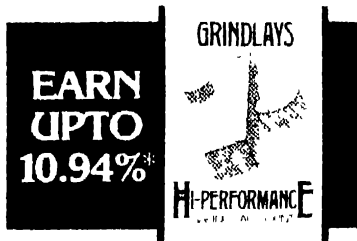
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## SIGHT AND SOUND



R.K. AXMAN THE TIMES OF INDIA



■ I have written no such letter—eight page or any page. It is also preposterous to even think that the Union home minister can have anything to do with subversives in J&K

**GEORGE FERNANDES**, Union railways minister, denying rumours of having written a letter to the Prime Minister charging Mufti Mohammad Sayeed of having links with terrorists

■ The issue (in Kashmir) is not lives. The issue is the durability of the Indian state. And the Indian state cannot be allowed to break—at any risk

**I K GUJRAL**, Union minister for external affairs

■ We are willing to talk but India is not. India cannot wish away the problem because it exists. They have to talk to us because we are a party to the dispute

**ZULFIQAR ALI KHAN**, Pakistani ambassador to the USA

■ If pushed beyond a point by Pakistan, we will retaliate.

**KRISHNASWAMY SUNDARJI**, former chief of army staff

■ I am not going to compromise with anyone.

nor do I care for the chair of the chief minister

**LALOO PRASAD YADAV**, chief minister of Bihar

■ I don't know why anybody would want to be a minister

**MANEKA GANDHI**, Union minister of state for environment

■ Only the National Front know since when they have adopted a policy of not appointing a minister through the backdoor

**JYOTI BASU**, West Bengal CM on whether Ashoke Sen had not been given a portfolio because he had been defeated in the last Lok Sabha election

■ We have never had any problem here despite the presence of a large number of Indian and Pakistani expatriates and

our main aim is to cement the relationships here and not to strain them

**ASIF IQBAL**, coordinator, Cricketers Benefit Fund Series, on the eve of the Sharjah tournament

■ What I am aiming for, you see, is immortality, and not stardom. When I'm gone, I want people to miss me and say what a fine actress I was

**MADHURI DIXIT**, actress





# Out of his depth

*Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's appointment as home minister was a gambit that didn't pay off*



"But does he have luck?" Napoleon is reported to have asked when considering the suitability of a particular general to lead troops into battle. If one asked the same

question in relation to the fortunes of the Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the answer would be a resounding 'no'.

In these very columns, I remember, I hailed the swearing-in of the Mufti as home minister and complimented V.P. Singh for making an inspired and wise choice. Indeed, the appointment of the first Muslim in independent India to the sensitive post was not only welcomed for the symbolic signals it sent, but also, as a reassurance to 100 million Muslims reeling under the ravages of communal riots and militant Hindu revivalism.

Luck, alas, ran out on the Mufti even before he was comfortably ensconced in his new chair. The unfortunate abduction of his daughter in Srinagar and the disgraceful exchange that took place at his insistence post-haste to procure her release ensured that, in Jammu and Kashmir in particular, and in the country in general, the Mufti's bank of goodwill eroded rapidly. At that time, there was genuine sympathy for the luckless father torn between duty to his family and his country, and most people either forgave him the lapse or preferred not to talk about it. In retrospect, it was an appallingly bad settlement and since then the Mufti has been little more than a lame-duck home minister.

In the next crisis he faced, the Ram Janmabhoomi vs. M.S.M. dispute, the Mufti hardly played a role, quickly becoming a piece of Kashmiri decoration periodically picked up and displayed to the media. The All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) had no time for him because even in his home state the Mufti's credentials as a Muslim, Kash-

miri leader were always in doubt. For the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) he was a 'traitor', someone who had sold out the country's interest to obtain his daughter. Not surprisingly, the VHP and the AIBMAC insisted that they would do business only with the Prime Minister.

On Punjab, the Mufti has been similarly elbowed out. V.P. Singh himself has projected such a high profile, he has been to Punjab twice in four months, that the home minister can do little else but tag three steps behind. As if that was not enough, the deputy prime minister, a self-styled expert on Punjab, has got into the act in a big way, claiming that his friendship and long association with senior Akali leaders makes him an ideal choice for rapprochement and mediation.

Altogether, then, the Mufti cuts a sorry figure today. He has all the pomp and grandeur of office, but only a fraction of its power and authority. No one takes him seriously. He travels to Assam mouthing platitudes on the Bodo problem, periodically warns Pakistan to cease "mischief", tumbles in Parliament, and in the past week, the most useful job he seems to have performed is attend and host innumerable 'Iftaar' dinners around the country. When George Fernandes was appointed as special minister, specifically to revive the political process in the state, and he quickly put together a parallel administration, the exercise was seen as a calculated insult to the Mufti and a reflection on his and his nominee's (Jagmohan) competence to handle the emergency in Jammu and Kashmir. There were reports then that the home minister was contemplating resigning and by all reliable accounts he was very close to quitting. We are told he was advised not to press his resignation in "the national interest". What a pity. The Mufti would have served the national interest better if he had pressed.

Doubtless, it is easy and mean to hit a man when he is down and out.

Perhaps Mufti Mohammad would have been a more effective home minister if his ministerial career had not been dogged by ill luck from the start. After all, who can anticipate or prepare for a kidnapping? These are acts of divine whim and even Allah-fearing mortals are not immune to their consequences. Nevertheless, given his unfortunate initiation, the Mufti should have conducted himself in a manner that would have inspired confidence. Instead, he has floundered from one crisis to another in the process showing not one whit of ability or imagination.

His timing is disastrous, his judge-





ments are simplistic, his talents as a mediator/negotiator are non-existent, his grasp on detail is minimal, he seldom has now, much less daring, ideas and he is the master of the practised cliché ("the immediate task is to regain the confidence of the people of Jammu and Kashmir"), in the Parliament he is incessantly heckled and the deal he made with the JKLF hangs like an albatross around his neck. Compared to him Buta Singh was a picture of dynamism. In short, he is completely out of his depth in what is the most sensitive and critical ministry in the National Front government.

A random sample of the Mufti's statements on one day makes instructive reading. On 25 April he advised the Lok Sabha that courtesy Jagmohan, law and order had been "restored" in Jammu and Kashmir. Note the past tense, not "in the process of being restored", or "last being restored", but "restored". Now, as Mufti Mohammad Sayeed well knows, a

word-for-word transcript is kept of deliberation in Parliament with members, especially from Opposition minister and the government he represents. Therefore, you have to be exceedingly foolish or crazily optimistic to make such categorical pronouncements on the basis of a 48-hour let-up in violence.

Moreover, the home minister must have been aware that even as he spoke, his colleague, Inder Gujral, was about to meet his Pakistani counterpart in the Waldorf Astoria hotel to protest and complain about "massive" aid to terrorist groups from across the border and warn that if such interference did not stop, we would have to take punitive action. In other words, while the external affairs minister was making a song and dance in international fora about Pakistani support for terrorism and subversion, the home minister was telling the Indian Parliament that the problem had been contained. Even if that conclusion was sound, its timing was Chaplinesque. If

himself on Jammu and Kashmir he made another characteristic blunder in the House. He stated "The government is committed to holding of elections in Punjab within six months". Again, there were no qualifications to this commitment, no mention of improvement in the law and order situation as an essential pre-requisite, no mention of new Akali alignments. So, even while the tallest, most influential Akali leader, Simranjeet Singh Mann, is threatening to go to the United Nations demanding a plebiscite, our home minister, without ifs and buts, is promising early Assembly elections?

Contrast this with what the Prime Minister and senior ministers have been saying "We will try our best to have elections within six months"—a position which leaves an escape route. Anyone with even a passing acquaintance with the situation on the ground in Punjab recognises that as things stand, there is no question of elections by October this year. Indeed, with Sardar Mann now operating firmly from the margins, terrorist activity is bound to escalate, thus making a further dose of President's rule inevitable. All the more reason, then, to be extremely cautious while making statements on Punjab.

More 25 April Mufti gems. "On the Ram Janmabhoomi issue efforts are on to bring the parties involved in the dispute to the table so as to reach an amicable settlement". In five weeks, the grace period given by the VHP to the Prime Minister expires, if this is the level of understanding and preparedness on the issue today, then a long, hot and bloody summer awaits this country.

It was an audacious gambit on the part of V.P. Singh to make Mufti Mohammad Sayeed home minister. If he had performed with even a bit of spark, the appointment of the first Muslim home minister in independent India would have gone down in history books. Now it will only be a footnote, a brave move that went badly wrong. The Mufti clearly is a light-weight politician of light-weight talent. His presence in the Union Cabinet may be necessary for reasons of balance or region-wise representation, but he cannot continue to occupy a ministry which will determine the fate of this government. Since he has already been marginalised, the *coup-de-grace* should be speedily administered. He must be shifted to some ministry like tourism or surface transport. •

### **The appointment of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as home minister by V.P. Singh was a brave move that went badly wrong**

the fight against terrorism, a fight which usually lasts years if not decades, had been won in two months in Jammu and Kashmir, then Pakistan was probably right in insisting that it was entirely a home-grown revolt. Surely, that would be the judgement of the international community too if it took cognisance of the Mufti's statement in Parliament.

How badly the home minister keeps himself informed was further demonstrated when the following morning, along with his extraordinary claim, was printed news that terrorists had gunned down five innocent civilians in Jammu. Did the Mufti know this when he made the announcement in the Lok Sabha? Did he know that there is still a daily 16-hour curfew in the Valley? Did he know that things are so bad that Governor Jagmohan's *Ifjaar* dinner was boycotted by most of the invitees?

On the day that the Mufti delivered





# BOFORS

*An on-the-spot report from Geneva*

*"By paying commissions to third parties, whoever they may be, in violation of their contractual engagement and in the context of the facts described in the Letter Rogatory, the AB Bofors organisation engaged in cheating."*

*"That by alleging a convention—of 2 and 13 January, 1986—between Svenska Inc., beneficiary without right of commissions and Bofors, which is predated, proves forgery."*

*"Thus, in consequence, the facts contained in the present Letter Rogatory would also be illegal under federal law if they had been committed in Switzerland."*

*"Thus the condition of dual criminality is realised."*

—Juge d'Instruction M. Paul Perraudin, Pouvoir Judiciaire, Republique et Canton de Geneve, 26 March, 1990 (Translated from the French)

**I**t was—by any standards—an extraordinarily strong *ordonnance d'admissibilite de l'entraide*. In late March, Paul Perraudin, the judge to whom the canton of Geneva had entrusted the investigation into the Bofors-India deal, ruled that the actions of

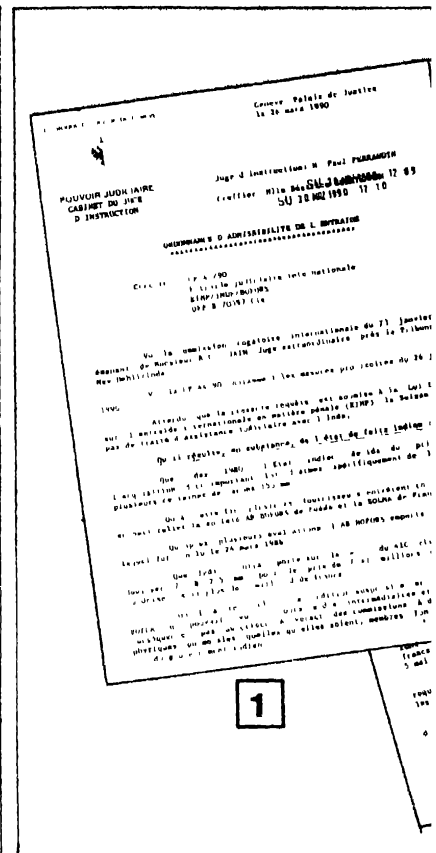
Bofors and its agents would have been crimes had they taken place in Switzerland. Thus, he declared, he would admit the Letter Rogatory submitted by the Indian authorities and proceed with the investigation. Perraudin's ruling marked the biggest legal victory won so far by the Indian authorities in their efforts to discover where the Bofors commissions went. When Pierre Schmid of the Swiss legal department froze the Bofors accounts, the Indian in-

vestigators regarded this as a moral triumph. In fact, the freezing of accounts is a routine move and does not in itself indicate whether the Swiss are disposed to follow up a request. It is not till the *Juge d'Instruction* decides that a case has been made out that the Swiss officially acknowledge that there is evidence of dual criminality and begin the procedure.

Perraudin's ruling has attracted relatively little attention in India, but in Switzerland those who have read his statement are struck by the force with which he has endorsed India's claims. Earlier, sceptics had said that the Swiss would rule that no crime had been committed after all it is not illegal in Switzerland to receive commissions. For two years, the Rajiv Gandhi regime hid behind this excuse, carefully framing requests in terms that were certain to be rejected and then taking refuge in the much-publicised impenetrability of the Swiss banking system.

Perraudin's ruling exposes the last government's stand. He says that dual criminality has been established on the following grounds:

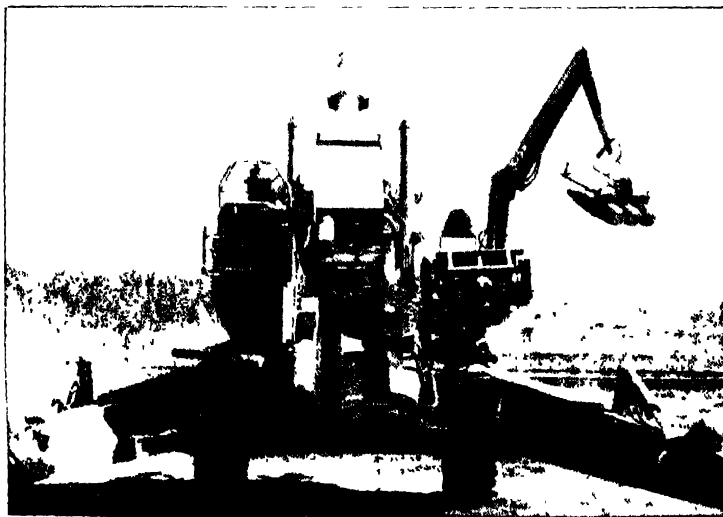
- The possibility that a public official (or his nominee) should have received



some of the kickbacks suggests corruption—a crime in Switzerland.

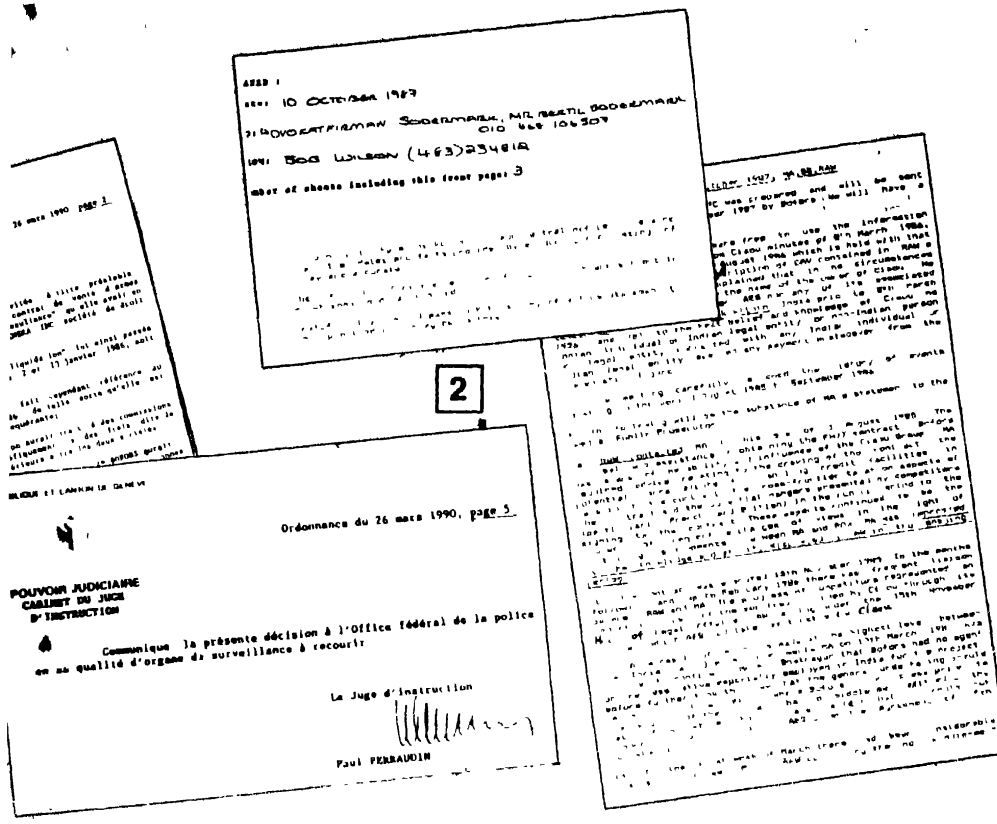
- Because Bofors paid commissions after promising to eliminate all middlemen, it engaged in cheating—a crime under Swiss law.

- The fact that a document purporting to cancel a contract between Bofors and Svenska and allegedly signed on 2 and 13 January, 1986 should refer to an event that occurred on 24 March, 1986, suggests that Bofors resorted to forgery—also a crime in Switzerland.



**W**ith Perraudin's admission of the Indian case, the Bofors investigation moves into its most crucial phase. The day he issued his ruling, Perraudin sent out letters to the four banks in the Geneva canton named by the Indian Letter Rogatory (Swiss Bank Corporation, Credit Suisse, Manufacturers' Hanover Trust and Pictet et Cie). The banks were told to find out if any of the Bofors agents had accounts with them and





**1**  
**The letter of admissibility:**  
Judge Paul Perraudin thinks the Indian case is very strong

**2**  
**The Ardbo-Wilson deal:**  
The minutes of their meeting reveal new information about AE Services

if they did, to submit all details within ten days

Only one bank (Credit Suisse) appealed. Bankers acting for the principals of the Mont Blanc account claimed that the money had been pledged against funds borrowed for another transaction. Before Perraudin could rule whether to uphold this appeal however, it was withdrawn and the procedure continued without a hitch.

At present, Perraudin has all the details relating to two Bofors agents (Moresco and Svenska) and knows who the beneficiaries are. He also knows to whom payments have been made from these accounts and if the money has gone to other accounts in Switzerland, then he knows the identities of the ultimate recipients.

He is expected to take up to three months to decide whether the prima facie case made out by the Letter Rogatory is backed up by what he finds in the accounts.

If he decides that the Indian authorities are right, then he hands them the names.

**C**onsidering how well the investigation into Bofors has progressed so far, the agents have reason to be

worried. Because many Swiss lawyers are privately convinced that Perraudin will decide to transmit the names to India, the agents have begun to take preventive action.

In Perraudin's canton, there are really only two agents. There is Svenska, the Panamanian company owned by Win Chadha from which money is believed to have gone to low-level Indian officials and military men. Chadha is currently in poor health in Dubai and his immediate preoccupation consists of trying to hang on to his Indian passport. He is therefore, unlikely to hire expensive lawyers and try and block Perraudin's investigation.

**With Judge Perraudin's admission of the Indian case, the Bofors investigation moves into its most crucial phase. Within three months, he might name the beneficiaries**

That leaves the interest behind Moresco. Originally, Bofors hired Pitco (for Parmanand International Trading Company), a Hinduja Group company, in 1979 to act as its agent. In 1984, this entitlement was transferred to Moresco and Bofors was told to pay the commissions into three accounts: Lotus, Tulip and Mont Blanc.

There is no evidence to prove that Moresco is also owned by the non-resident Hinduja brothers (of whom Gopichand and Srichand live in London, Prakash in Geneva and Ashok in Bombay), but it seems a reasonable assumption in the light of entries in Martin Ardbo's diary which suggest that he worked out a cover-up operation along with Gopichand (GP) Hinduja after the scandal broke.

While the Hinduja brothers have consistently denied their involvement in the deal, few have believed them. Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials claim that they have been followed in Geneva by detectives hired by the Hinduja brothers and certainly, they appear to be tracking the progress of the investigation with great vigour.

Last month, Chitra Subramaniam reported that the Tulip account was held in the names of the three non-resident Hinduja brothers (Gopi, Srichand



and Prakash) and there are persistent reports that Mont Blanc has Prakash Hinduja as its beneficiary.

It is, therefore, in the Hinduja's interest to prevent Perraudin from revealing the names of the Moresco beneficiaries. So far, they have played their cards close to the chest by refusing to launch a formal appeal (excluding the one filed by Credit Suisse on behalf of Mont Blanc).

They know they can file an appeal any time during the three months or so that it will take Perraudin to conduct his investigation. Even if they do not interfere with Perraudin's procedure, they can wait till the judge transmits the names to Berne for handing over to the Indian government. At that stage, they can appeal against giving the names to India. And if their appeal is over-ruled they can go to central and federal courts to keep the matter tied up in litigation.

**S**upporters of the Hinduja point to the case of the late deposed Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos. That case was admitted in 1985 but the matter is still in the courts and the Swiss have not been able to transmit the names of the Marcos-related account-holders to the Philippines government.

On what grounds could the Hinduja appeal? Their lawyers are said to have worked out a list of 15 grounds,

**C**onsidering how well the investigation into Bofors has progressed so far, the agents have reason to be worried. In fact, they have even begun to take preventive action

nearly all of which have to do with the Indian-Letter Rogatory. They claim:

- That R C Jain, the special judge who signed the Letter Rogatory, was coerced into doing so. When he asked for more evidence, he was transferred to the law ministry. (Nonsense, say law ministry officials, there was no coercion and Jain's transfer had been in the works since last year.)
- That the Letter Rogatory was 'corrupted' after it left India and that changes were made in it without the judge's knowledge. One instance: Section 20 of the Letter makes it clear that the "enquiry will be effected only by the competent Swiss authorities and not by the officers deputed from India."

The Hinduja's lawyers claim that the original Letter did not have this

provision but that it was added by the flamboyant Marc Bonnant, the Indian government's Swiss lawyer, who knew that without it the Swiss were certain to reject the Letter Rogatory.

(Rubbish, says the CBI. No changes have been made in the Letter.)

- That the CBI has continued to send the Swiss list after list of suspects, something it has no right to do after the original FIR is filed.

(Even the Swiss say this objection is a bit dubious. An FIR merely sets out the broad outlines of the case. Details can be filled in at any stage afterwards.)

**W**ill all this hold up in court? Despite the optimism displayed by the Hinduja camp, others are quite sceptical. They reckon that the Hinduja's are merely seeking to delay the enquiry by tying it up in legalese.

There is something to this view. Shortly after this government was elected, the Hinduja's put out feelers in Delhi to the effect that they were willing to be approvers in the case. In fact, as anybody who knows the Hinduja's well (i.e. the *Indian Express* which resisted naming them in the scandal right till the very end because it had been taken in by the family's promises of help) has learned to his peril, such tactics only end up delaying the denouement.

The government did not take the

## THE SUSPECTS ■ Who's who in the list the CBI gave the Swiss

- **Pitco:** Hinduja company hired by Bofors in 1979
- **Moresco:** New company to which Pitco transferred the entitlement
- **Moineao:** Company that Bofors claims replaced Moresco
- **Svenska:** Win Chadha's Panamanian company
- **AE Services Ltd:** The mysterious third agent hired at the last moment
- **Anatronic General Corporation:** Win Chadha's New Delhi company
- **W.N. Chadha alias Win Chadha:** Bofors' long-time representative in India
- **Harsh Chadha:** Son of Win
- **G.P. Hinduja:** London-based businessman to whom Pitco

communications were sent

- **Prakash Hinduja:** Geneva-based brother of G.P.
- **Sangam Ltd:** The Hinduja's best-known London-based company
- **Myles Stott:** A director of AE Services

### AMITABH BACHCHAN



- **Major Wilson:** A lawyer. The front man for AE Services.
  - **O. Quatrochi:** Indian representative of Snamprogetti and friend of Rajiv Gandhi.
  - **Amitabh Bachchan:** Actor and friend of Rajiv Gandhi.
  - **Ajitabh Bachchan:** Brother of Amitabh
  - **M. Lafond:** Banker in charge of one of the Bofors accounts
  - **Bernard Meier:** Another Swiss banker in charge of Bofors accounts
  - **Emil G. Marshi:** Old Hinduja associate. Handled the Tulip account
  - **Martin Ardbo:** Former chief of Bofors.
- (Names submitted to Swiss)



WIN CHADHA

on 26 January, 1990.)

- **Carl Bedzel:** Individual to whom Bofors made payments in 1986
- **Gavelin Shipping:** A Bofors agent, perhaps on another deal
- **EMAC Ltd:** Firm



Hindujas seriously and a red alert was put out at all airports to arrest Gopi Hinduja if he landed in India. At the same time, Ashok, the youngest brother who is ordinarily resident in Bombay, also left for London where he has remained ever since. (It is believed that he fears arrest the moment the identities of the Moresco beneficiaries are leaked, though, from all accounts, his name does not feature.)

The Hindujas are now left with only one option: to delay and to hope that the government falls in the meantime. The 'delay' part of the strategy consists of objections to the Letter Rogatory and the like. It is the second aspect of the design that is the most interesting. The Hindujas have traditionally maintained strong links with the Bharatiya Janata Party (originally through Ramnath Goenka) and now they hope that pressure from such heavyweights as Atal Behari Vajpayee will so severely limit the regime's room for manoeuvre that it will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions.

It is an audacious strategy but judging by current political equations, it will not work. Even such Hinduja buddies as V.C. Shukla and R.K. Hegde have been unusually reticent about coming to their aid. And Ram Jethmalani has claimed (in a *Sunday* interview) that while the Hindujas may not have been the Bofors agents,

**This government lacks neither the motivation nor the resources to get at the truth. Yet, the progress of the investigation seems to owe more to the Swiss**

they were certainly part of the cover-up. (Incidentally, this is the Hinduja family's own off-the-record position. As they told *The Hindu's* N. Ram, they stepped in to save the Rajiv government even though they made no money out of the deal.)

**W**hile Perraudin's investigation is now almost certain to throw up the names of the interests behind Svenska and Moresco, a second investigation has been largely ignored by the Indian authorities and consequently, by the media.

Because of Switzerland's federal structure, the process of investigation is handed over to the cantons (a cross between provinces and states). The Letter Rogatory named seven accounts. Of these, four were in

Geneve (Mont Blanc, Tulip, Lotus and Svenska). The authorities also asked the Swiss to check and see if there was an account at Pictet et Cie, one of Switzerland's best-known private banks (not the "little-known financial services company" of the CBI briefings) to which "funds have been transferred to by AB Bofors or by transfer from other accounts to which funds have been transferred by AB Bofors". It is not known whether Perraudin has in fact found such an account at Pictet et Cie but it is certain that he is investigating the other four.

But Perraudin has nothing to do with what might be the most crucial account of them all: the AF Services account at Nordfmanz Bank. Because that bank is in Zurich, which is part of another canton, the AF Services investigation is in the hands of another judge: Dieter Jan. He is handling the enquiry into the Nordfmanz account as well as another investigation into an account at the Zurich Parade Platz branch of Credit Suisse. (This seventh account does not feature in *The Hindu* documents, but the Indian government has asked for it to be frozen on exactly the same basis as the Pictet et Cie account.)

Little is known about Dieter Jan mainly because of the manner in which the Indian investigation is run. While the CBI team (headed by the voluble additional solicitor-general



**S.K. BHATNAGAR**

alleged, by Swedish Radio, to have acted as Bofors agent.

- **Bost Ltd:** Company which received money from Bofors in 1986.
- **Bid SE Ltd:** A firm which Bofors intended to

hire for the India deal.

- **Bid Engineering:** Singapore-based associate of Bid SE.
- **Sogevalor:** The holding company for Moresco, Bofors' Indian agent.
- **Arco Lab:** Ajitabh Bachchan's company.
- **Arco Pharma:** Another of Ajitabh's companies.
- **MS Visca:** Identity unknown.
- **Walter Vinci:** Sonia Gandhi's brother-in-law.
- **Val de Moro:** Another of Sonia's brothers-in-law.
- **M.K. Jajodia:** New Delhi-based businessman.
- **A.K. Jajodia:** Relative of M.K. Jajodia.
- **Bhupinder Singh:** Identity not confirmed. Could be the former STC

chief.

- **P.C. Schlegel:** Identity unknown.
- **J.P. Mollard:** Identity unknown.
- **Hans Ekblom:** Senior Bofors executive when deal was signed.
- **Ives Pirenne:** Ajitabh's Swiss lawyer.
- **Shivendra Panwar:**

**OTAVIO QUATTROCHI**



Individual to whom Bofors made payments in 1986.

- **M.T. Shah:** Businessman said to be linked to Bid Engineering.
  - **Surjit Kaur Chahal:** Woman who received money from Bofors.
  - **Mr Chaudhary:** Believed to be a Pakistani whom Bofors paid in 1986.
  - **S.K. Bhatnagar:** Defence secretary when deal was signed. (List submitted on 7 February, 1990.)
- It is not certain whether S.P. Hinduja's name also features.

**Note:** Many spellings are wrong (i.e. Hersh Chadha and Javelin Shipping) but this is the way they appear in the Letter Rogatory.



# The crucial account

## New revelations about the mysterious third agent

**T**he first thing that anybody who hopes to understand Bofors must accept is that nobody tells the truth. Not AB Bofors itself, not the agents, not the politicians and not the investigators.

But even by those less than exacting standards, the saga of AE Services is one big lie from beginning to end. Some instances:

- The firm was hired as an agent by Bofors in November 1985, a month after Rajiv Gandhi had told Olat Palme that India wanted no middlemen. So why did Bofors hire a new agent that late in the day? "We forgot," Bofors' chief executive Per Ove Morberg told the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

- Unlike the two other agents, AE Services is fronted by identifiable individuals. Its spokesman, Major R.A. Wilson, told SUNDAY in 1988 that the firm had done work in the Middle East and was owned by Arab interests.

However, the registered accounts of AE Services and of its Lichtenstein-based parent, CIAOU Anstalt, show that it had never traded before this deal: not in the Middle East or elsewhere.

- In its report, the JPC made out that AE was a legitimate company that operated out of an office in Guildford, Surrey, England. And that Major Wilson ran it from there.

In fact, the only link that AE has with Surrey is that its registered office is in a solicitor's firm in Guildford. (Several other companies use the same address and AE is identified only by its old name: Target Practice Ltd.)

Moreover, Wilson does not live in Guildford, though his estranged wife has a cottage there. He spends most of the year in France and the British register of solicitors lists him as practising out of Switzerland.

- Wilson also told the JPC that the money deposited by Bofors was still in AE's account at Nordfinanz, Zurich, pending a tax claim by the British Inland Revenue.

In fact, the money was withdrawn days after it was deposited.

- The Hindujas have frequently claimed that they don't know Wilson. But, in his diary, Martin Ardbo, former Bofors chief, refers to a conversation between Wilson and the Hindujas.

Because AE Services was hired after the Rajiv-Palme meeting and because it received a commission (upto three per cent of contract value—the sum to be deducted from Svenska's entitlement) for only four months work (which Wilson says it never did, anyway)—AE is the crucial Bofors agent.

If there was a political kickback, it went into this account.

**N**ow, a confidential Bofors document obtained by Chitra Subramaniam (and never published before) shows that AE Services told other lies.

The document consists of the

minutes of a meeting between Bofors' Martin Ardbo, his lawyer Bertil Sodermark and Major R.A. Wilson. The minutes were drawn up by Wilson and faxed to Sodermark on 10 October, 1987.

The minutes show that the meeting was part of the cover-up operation and that Wilson and Bofors co-ordinated their strategies. Wilson told Ardbo what he would tell the JPC and Ardbo sent him a copy of Bofors' statement to the committee. (So much for the fiction that by then, Ardbo was out of Bofors!)

While the JPC concluded that AE had done no work before its contract was terminated and that Bofors only paid it a winding-up charge, Wilson adopted a different stance in the meeting. And though the JPC said no Indian owned any of the agents, Wilson's position was far more guarded.

- On what work AE had done, the minutes quote him as saying "neither AES nor any of its associated companies had done any work within (his emphasis) India." This

**No office: the solicitor's chamber in Guildford that AE uses as an address**





is not the stand the JPC took.

• And he made no statements about AE's ownership which indicated that it was not owned by an Indian. All he said was that "no Indian individual or Indian legal entity...received any payments whatsoever from the compensation figure". This meant that AE's owners did not pay off Indians, but not that they themselves were not Indians. The JPC took a different view.

So why did Bofors hire AE after it had been told to fire its agents? Now, Bofors has no explanation and *The Hindu* has obtained a copy of the Bofors-AE contract, which states that AE would get its cut only if the deal was signed by the end of March 1986. (It was.)

But then, in October 1987, Ardbo and Wilson constructed a different story. They said that AE had been hired to render legal advice and so was not, strictly speaking, an agent. However, on 5 March, 1986, Ardbo felt that Bofors should have no agents at all—even legal advisers—at the time of signing the deal and so, he told Wilson that Bofors was sacking AE. Wilson threatened to sue and a compensation figure of \$7,343,931.98 was worked out. (This in itself is absurd. Compensation is lump sums. Only commissions are calculated down to the last cent.)

This is the defence contained in the minutes and it is clearly fraudulent because we now know that AE's work for Bofors would have ended at the end of March anyway. So why terminate the contract on 5 March? And how could Wilson claim that the winding-up charges were in lieu of future lost earnings when the contract had only 26 days left?

**A**re legal advisers paid percentage commissions on arms deals? Surely, AE should have been paid a fee for such services? Wilson had anticipated this objection. The minutes reveal that while constructing his defence, he evolved another explanation for AE's hiring.

"Bofors was aware of the ability and influence (our emphasis) of the CIAOU Group. Martin Ardbo required advice relating to the draw-

ing of the contract, the potential arrangements for handling credit facilities in relation to the contract, the cross-frontier taxation aspects of the contract and the potential dangers presented by competitors (particularly French and British) in the run-up period to the signing of the contract."

In other words, legal advice, 'influence' and industrial espionage. The industrial espionage theory was—finally—never used by Bofors or AE Services. But a year after this meeting, somebody else did use it.

"It was paid for genuine work, then we cannot question it...Genuine work gathering information against the French weapon, for example. That is industrial espionage. You can't grudge them that."

That was Rajiv Gandhi in October 1988.

**S**o who owns AE Services? Wilson's explanations are plainly bogus. There is no service that a shelf company with no offices or staff could have rendered Bofors. Not even industrial espionage which requires at least a few employees or payments to detective agencies. And both AE and CIAOU's accounts make it clear that neither firm had any employees or made any payments.

What about the consortium of Arab interests, hinted at by Wilson in his 1988 interview to *SUNDAY*? Unlikely. Moreover, the minutes make it clear that there was no consortium, just a single owner.

"R.A. Wilson explained that in no circumstances could he be made to reveal the name of the owner (our emphasis) of CIAOU."

Who this single, secretive owner is must remain a matter of speculation till the Swiss finish their investigation.

Meanwhile, there are suggestions that the money emptied from AE's Nordfinanz account in Zurich was transferred to another account, also in Zurich, at the Union Bank of Switzerland. Major Wilson is authorised to operate this account, but the name of the ultimate beneficiary is not known.

Could this be the sixth account the Swiss are said to have told Arun Jaitley and party about?

**Vir Sanghvi/Geneve and London**

Arun Jaitley) has made frequent trips to Geneva, it has given Zurich a miss. As nearly all stories on Bofors appearing in India consists of leaks from Jaitley and his colleagues (with the notable exception of those authored by Chitra Subramaniam and N. Ram), the Zurich investigation has hardly been noticed.

But in many ways, AE Services is the most crucial of the three Bofors agents. It was brought in at the last moment, a month after India told Bofors to fire its agents and made over seven million dollars in four months without—by Bofors' own admission—doing anything for the money (see box). Obviously, this was no agency arrangement, but a straight-forward kickback.

All this makes the AE Services account at Nordfinanz the most interesting of the five Bofors accounts (seven, if the Swiss found anything at Pictet or Credit Suisse, Zurich). And yet, it is the one that is most ignored.

**AE Services is the most interesting of the Bofors accounts. And yet, it is the one that is most ignored. We still don't know who owned it**

It is perhaps significant that the AE Services account should be the one where three appeals have been filed. Three different individuals (all using the same lawyer) have written to Judge Jan insisting that the principals of AE Services are guilty of no crime under Swiss laws. They seek to prevent the names of the beneficiaries from being revealed.

So far Jan has not stopped his investigation, though the appeals are being processed. Little is known about the identities of those who have appealed, but all three are Europeans though one has American connections perhaps he is resident in the United States.

**T**he secret of AE Services remains the biggest mystery in the Bofors affair but running it a close second is the story of 'the sixth account'.

This account first came to light when the CBI team returned from Switzerland after meeting Pierre



## THE INVESTIGATION



### GENEVE

**Paul Perraudin**, investigating judge

### FIVE ACCOUNTS

#### 1. Svenska

Owned by Win Chadha

#### 2. Moresco—three different accounts

##### a) Tulip

Owned by Hinduja

##### b) Mont Blanc

Owned by Hinduja

##### c) Lotus

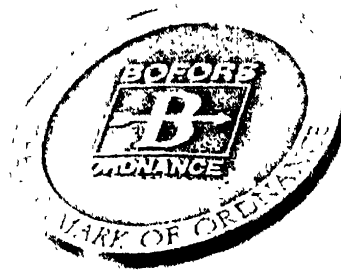
Owner unknown

#### 3. Pictet et Cie

Not known if there is an account at all

### APPEALS FILED

One—by Credit Suisse Later withdrawn



### ZURICH

**Dieter Jan**, investigating judge

### TWO ACCOUNTS

#### 1. AE Services

Fronted by R A Wilson. Beneficiary unknown

#### 2. Credit Suisse

Not known if there is an account

### APPEALS FILED

Three—by two Europeans and one American resident, all on behalf of AE Services. All three have the same lawyer

Schmid of the Swiss legal department. While the Swiss made no official statement, the CBI said that, in addition to the five accounts mentioned by *The Hindu*, a sixth account had been discovered and frozen.

Off the record, the investigators were more voluble. They said that when they asked Schmid to freeze the five accounts, he volunteered a sixth into which, he said, money from one of the five had been transferred. But, he told the CBI, it was not in the names of those mentioned in the FIR, so did they have any other suspects? At this, the CBI team wrote out a list of 20 names (see box) including those featured in the FIR. Fine, said Schmid, the account is in the name of one of these persons and we'll freeze it.

This version of what happened appeared in the Indian press following background briefings by the CBI.

Then *Dagens Nyheter*, a Swedish daily based in Stockholm, quoted 'sources' close to the Indian investigation and said that the account was in the name of Ajitabh Bachchan. This report was creeded by *India Abroad News Service* and widely reproduced. Strangely, the CBI refused to comment. Its director, Rajendra Shekhar, told the press, "Even if I knew, I wouldn't say."

### The Hinduja: the noose tightens



SUNDAY quoted the *Dagens Nyheter* story (see cover story 'The ten per cent Raj', 4-10 March 1990) and interviewed Chitra Subramaniam who said that the CBI had stumbled on the sixth account. Shortly after this article appeared, the CBI wrote an official letter saying that Subramaniam was wrong and that it had found the sixth account as a consequence of its own efforts—the details of which it did not specify.

Ajitabh Bachchan then sued *Dagens Nyheter* and *India Abroad* and sent legal notices to SUNDAY, the *Indian Express* and *Janmabhoomi*. (Of the three, *Janmabhoomi* has apologised, neither SUNDAY nor the *Express* has.) He denied that he had anything to do with the sixth account "assuming that such an account exists."

The CBI made no official statement to support its off-the-record briefings.

Currently, nobody is sure if there is a sixth account, though the balance of evidence seems to suggest that there is one. In the Letter Rogatory, the Swiss have been asked to freeze a sixth account (at Pictet) and a seventh (at Credit Suisse, Zurich) if these have a bearing on Bofors. Are these the sixth and seventh accounts? If so, have they been frozen?

There is some confusion too about the lists of suspects submitted by the CBI to the Swiss. The first list of 20 carried the names thrown up by *The Hindu's* investigations but added three Ottavio Quattrochi and the Bachchan brothers. The grounds were simple enough. All three were friends of Rajiv's and Quattrochi might have been the 'Q' referred to in the Ardbo diaries.

According to the CBI, the sixth account was in the name of one of the 20. That could include Ajitabh, but it could also include 19 others.

Then on 7 February, nine days after it had handed in its first list of suspects, the CBI submitted 24 new names. The Swiss were asked to see if any of these persons had been paid from the Bofors accounts.

There was no single source for these suspects. Some (Bost Ltd, for instance) were companies to which Bofors had paid money during 1986-87, according to a computer printout of all Bofors payments obtained by *The Hindu*. It was entirely possible that the payment to Bost was in relation to a non-Indian deal, but the CBI thought it was a chance worth taking. Also on the list were those with





Indian-sounding names who appeared in that printout (Surjit Kaur Chahal, Mr Chaudhary, Shivendra Panwar, etc.) And there were some of the companies whose names featured in a list of alleged Bofors agents leaked to the *Indian Express* by Swedish sources in 1987.

Added to these were more Gandhi friends and relatives. Both of Sonia's brothers-in-law (Walter Vinci and Val de Moro) featured, so did two of Ajitabh's companies and so did his lawyer Yves Pirenne.

As lists of suspects go, it was not a bad one, especially as the CBI was working backwards from the assumption that Rajiv was involved in the deal. But when news that Sonia's family featured in the list leaked, Congressmen professed outrage, claiming that there was no prima facie evidence.

And the CBI, instead of standing its ground, resorted to subterfuge. Asked if Vinci and de Moro's names were on the list, a 'senior law ministry source' (no prizes for guessing his identity) assured Calcutta's *The Telegraph* that their names had been withdrawn. When the paper quoted him as saying so the following day, he turned reticent. And the CBI issued an official statement terming *The Telegraph* story "false and misleading." No names had been deleted, it said.

**The CBI's list of 47 suspects includes the names of Rajiv's friends and Sonia's relatives. Contrary to claims made by a senior law ministry official, the names have not been withdrawn**

All right, asked reporters, are Vinci and de Moro's names on the list? The CBI would not say. Would the bureau at least state how many names have been submitted to the 'Swiss'? No, it wouldn't. Had any names been submitted at all? No comment. And so on.

Two days later, *The Telegraph* responded by printing more of the names. This time, the CBI did not call its report "false and misleading."

The uproar over *The Telegraph* story and the bureau's unwillingness to state its case on the record are symptomatic of the current state of the Bofors enquiry. At one level, there is nothing wrong with naming Sonia's

relatives as suspects—after all, the CBI has a perfect right to investigate whoever it wants. But by lying, backtracking and then refusing to part with any information, it has succeeded in confusing the public. Much the same is true of the sixth account story. Why must so much of the briefing be off the record and full of innuendo, while the on-the-record information dissemination is full of bland I-can-neither-confirm-nor-deny-statement?

For two years, the Rajiv Gandhi regime and the CBI in its former avatar lied to the public about the Bofors investigation and misrepresented the results of its enquiries. Consequently, the press did the investigator's job (especially *The Hindu's* N. Ram and Chitra Subramaniam who broke the stories and the *Indian Express's* S. Gurumurthy who explained it all in articles that are masterpieces of interpretative journalism).

This government lacks neither the motivation nor the resources to get at the truth. Sadly, the progress of the investigation seems to owe more to the Swiss than to the Indians.

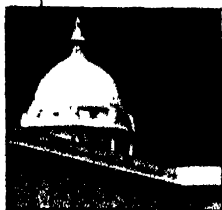
It would be a shame if this opportunity to nab those who featured in India's biggest post-war scandal slips away.

**Vir Sanghvi/Geneve, London and New Delhi**



# Choosing an army chief

*Should seniority or merit be the yardstick?*



To readers of this column, the appointment of Lieutenant-General S F Rodrigues—Rodri—to friends—as the next chief of the army staff could not have

come as a surprise. Besides being generally expected, it has been widely welcomed. However, it ought to have been announced at least three weeks earlier, if only to conform to the convention that selections of service chiefs be made public a minimum of three months before the changeover.

Even the "three month" Indian convention is, of course, grossly inadequate. Most other countries with military traditions worth the name, both western and those that used to be called socialist, announce top appointments in armed forces six to 12 months in advance. The advantages of this sensible system are obvious. In the first place, it avoids gnawing uncertainty, unhealthy speculation and unseemly lobbying which are bound to flourish when—as has unfortunately happened more than once in this country—the selection of a new service chief is delayed almost literally until the last minute. Secondly, it is only fair that an incoming chief should have enough time to think through whatever he intends to do during his tenure. For, as soon as he takes over, he is almost certain to be snowed under daily routine and the crises of the day, not to speak of the need to travel far and wide and to spend a lot of time on "meetings and eatings". There is little time to reflect.

Two of the more innovative chiefs of the army in India in the past have been General F N Rana and General K Sundari. Both were able to think out the important and necessary changes they wanted to make because they were given adequate time to do so before occupying the room at the top and not kept on tenterhooks until the very last.

Happily, the choice of Lt-Gen Rodrigues's successor as GOC in C of the Western Army Command—whose importance cannot be overstated in view

of the tension that prevails along the India-Pakistan border—has been equally popular. Lieutenant-General G S Grewal is an extremely able soldier who has won many laurels. However, it was by no means certain that he would get the Western Army Command.

This was so because of the seniority syndrome. There is no doubt that other things being equal, seniority must prevail. But surely seniority cannot be the be-all and end-all of the criteria for filling top posts. And yet such is the stranglehold of seniority on the Indian mind, both civilian and military, that the slightest deviation from the seniority list causes a most awful row.

Though disconcerting, this state of affairs is not entirely understandable. The sad truth is that faith in the fairness of the selectors in this country has broken down almost completely. Thus it is that America and Britain can place at the top of the military hierarchy a general, admiral or air-marshal who might be, say, 32nd on the seniority list, without causing even a squeak or inviting a single resignation. Here all hell breaks loose if seniority is not strictly adhered to. It also needs to be mentioned that while supersessions in the civil services go almost unnoticed, hackles are raised over the

slightest suggestion of a supersession in the armed forces.

Many competent IAS officers were superseded when Pratap Kaul was appointed Cabinet secretary by Rajiv Gandhi or when Vinod Pande was given the same job by V P Singh. With the appointment of Muchkund Dubey as the foreign secretary, claims of at least half-a-dozen IFS officers senior to him have been overlooked. But in none of these cases has there been anything like the uproar that has almost always greeted military supersessions. The most notable protest in recent years was over the appointment of the late General A S Vaidya as the army chief over the head of Lt-Gen S K Sinha. The feeling that this was an unfair thing to do, lies, at least partially, behind the Janata Dal government's decision to appoint Gen Sinha as the ambassador to Nepal. A lot of fuss has also been made over the denial of the army command to some Lieutenant-Generals during the era of Generals Vaidya and Sundari.

Against this backdrop, it is all the more remarkable that the consensus among the cognoscenti is that even though there were one or two officers senior to Lt-Gen Grewal, the government has done well to disregard seniority because of his outstanding professional record.

With Lt-Gen K S Brar and Lt-Gen B C Joshi having been already appointed army commanders in the east and south respectively, the Indian Army now has a leadership of which the country can be proud, especially because the critical Northern Command has been held with distinction by Lt-Gen Gurinder Singh.

It is with deep regret therefore that one has to report that the navy seems to be playing ducks and drakes with its future leadership. Since some decisions have yet to be finalised, the matter can be reported in detail only later. But enough indications are available to show that the most deplorable gerrymandering is on in relation to some critical appointments due to take effect soon even though a new navy chief would take over only in November. ●



**S.F. Rodrigues: man of the moment**





# Problems at home

**I**n fiction, mostly pulp, reformed highwaymen often make tough cops while alcoholics turn out to be high priests of abstinence. Real life, unfortunately, is different. Had it not been so, Gian Zail Singh, responsible for the rise of the Bhindranwale cult in Punjab, would have made an effective home minister under Indira Gandhi. He was a disaster. So was Buta Singh under Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership. A politician endowed with more cunning than intelligence, Buta Singh wound up his innings in the North Block, the seat of the home ministry, by putting his finger on the pie of every terrorist group in Punjab.

Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the present Union home minister, is no exception. His installation in December last year coincided with eruption of violence in the Kashmir Valley, his home state. And it has remained the country's worst trouble-spot ever

## *Union minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed finds the going tough*

since. The Mufti was the chief player of some of the initial moves leading to the present fiasco. No wonder, the home minister has become a liability for Prime Minister V P Singh. Bereft of Gian Zail Singh's redeeming earthiness, or Buta Singh's canny instinct for survival, the Mufti is a lightweight in the Janata Dal politics. But his job is much more challenging than his capability, and that's precisely what many Cabinet ministers, bureaucrats and political allies have been telling the Prime Minister on the quiet. The Mufti may have survived the reshuffle, but he is fast losing clout in the face of

multiplying charges of inefficiency and unreliability.

The main allegation against the Mufti is of course, the morally ambiguous manner in which he allowed five Kashmiri defenews to be released to free his kidnapped daughter, Rubaiya, from the clutches of captors. He now passes the buck conveniently on to the state government (*see interview*), as if the tottering government of Farooq Abdullah, who was still the chief minister at the time of the kidnapping in December last, would have taken a step without consulting the Union home ministry. A senior Cabinet minister now says on condition of anonymity that the Mufti, after securing the release of his daughter, "could at least have stepped down from office on moral grounds".

As the Mufti stuck to his post regardless, the government naturally had to bypass him. The home minister claims that he had been consulted at



every stage, but insiders aver that he had no clue whatsoever regarding the appointment of Jagmohan as the state Governor until the papers were sent to him for signing. Similarly, railway minister George Fernandes was given additional charge of Jammu and Kashmir without the Mufti's knowledge, not to speak of concurrence. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed tries to gloss over these embarrassing developments, but he knows full well that he is on a sticky wicket. His only insurance is the

possible fear in the mind of the Prime Minister that shifting the Mufti from home at this stage may give the Kashmir separatists yet another publicity handle.

**T**he Mufti fell from V P Singh's grace in December itself, when the fledgeling administration discovered to its amazement that the newly-appointed home minister was willing to go out of his way to favour Rajiv Gandhi's political supporters in the

bureaucracy, including Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief M K Narayanan. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reportedly brought to the Mufti's notice reports that Narayanan had been using IB computers to prepare a list of most probable Congress(I) candidates for the Assembly elections. But the Mufti ignored the warning. Instead, when the PMO made it clear that it wouldn't tolerate Narayanan's continuance as the IB director, the Mufti threw his weight to ensure that



## "I was consulted at every stage"

*Mufti Mohammad Sayeed on the appointments of Jagmohan and George Fernandes*

*Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the Union home minister, has not visited his ancestral home in Anantnag district of Kashmir for quite a few months now, thanks to the prevailing situation in the Valley. But his official residence on Akbar Road, only one house away from the corner bungalow occupied by his mentor, Arun Nehru, bustles with droves of petitioners, mostly Kashmiri Hindu refugees. The Mufti spoke about his "challenging job". Excerpts:*

**Sunday:** How bad, according to you, is the situation in Kashmir?

**Mufti Mohammad Sayeed:** Bad. Quite bad. Things have deteriorated quite dramatically in the past few months. There has been a slight improvement lately, but there is no basic change in the situation. I must say that of all the challenges we are faced with, in terms of the nation's unity and integrity, the one in Kashmir is the gravest.

**Q:** Where does the root of the problem lie?

**A:** People point at several reasons. Bad handling of the situation. Calousness of the administration. Many things. But I must say that Kashmir has been denied of even its basic rights as per the Constitution. There is a genuine feeling in Kashmir that Delhi has always imposed its likings and dislikings on the people, in violation of the basic human rights. People even compare the situation in Kashmir to the one prevailing in Pakistan during Zia's time.

**Q:** Why? Is there a feeling that elections in Kashmir were never free and fair?

**A:** There is a feeling that elections were

manipulated.

**Q:** In 1987?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** But you were a Central minister when the Rajiv-Farooq accord was signed?

**A:** Well, I resigned in protest.

**Q:** Yes. And Farooq Abdullah became the chief minister following the accord in November 1986. So, as a Union minister, you extended your support to the accord for nearly five months.

**A:** Though I was a member of the government, I was apprehensive right from the start. I thought that the Congress and the National Conference should have played their distinctive roles, as they had always played. But Farooq merely surrendered. I also found that the concept of the accord was not being accepted by the masses.

**Q:** After joining the Jan Morcha, did you campaign against the accord?

**A:** We were campaigning against the non-implementation of

the accord. There was no development work in Kashmir, no effort to change the quality of life of the people. We knew that it would lead to terrorism and militancy. We were constantly saying that Kashmir was going the Punjab way.

**Q:** Was Farooq Abdullah responsible for this?

**A:** Farooq says that the promises made by the accord to the people of Kashmir

**JAGMOHAN:** calling the shots





the sleuth became the chairman of the prestigious—though powerless—Joint Intelligence Council. Meanwhile the home minister had sent J. M Saxena, Narayanan's closest ally in the IB, to Srinagar as the director-general of J&K Police. Critics explained it by saying that the Mufti was an important source of information for Saxena when he was the IB boss in the northern state in the early Eighties.

Much of the Mufti's role during the kidnapping of his daughter, Rubaiya,

were not fulfilled. The promises concerned tourism development, border road development and eradication of the problem of educated unemployment. Those promises were not kept.

**Q:** There is a general feeling that you should have resigned after the government released five detenus in exchange for your daughter.

**A:** I think that after my becoming Union home minister, it was the responsibility of the state government to provide security to my family members. But the situation was such that the terrorists could kidnap my daughter.

**Q:** Who asked the state government to release the five detenus? You, or the Prime Minister?

**A:** It was decision of the state Cabinet. We said nothing.

**Q:** But why did the state administration not come up with the same response when the vice-chancellor of Kashmir University and two others were taken as hostages?

**A:** That's a different story.

They wanted a prisoner to be released in exchange, and negotiations were going on. But JKLF chief Amanullah Khan issued a statement from the US, saying that the three captured men had already been killed. The militants took it as a veiled order, and killed them without waiting further.

**Q:** Are you happy with the appointment of Jagmohan?

**GEORGE FERNANDES:**  
*upstaging the Mufti*



**A:** Why should I be unhappy. It is for the good of the country and Jammu and Kashmir.

**Q:** Were you consulted before the appointment?

**A:** Yes. Governors cannot be appointed without the home ministry's approval. Actually we went over a panel of three names: Jagmohan, K.F. Rustamji and Naresh Chandra, the present home secretary. Finally we selected Jagmohan judging by his past record, and the present situation in Kashmir.

**Q:** Were you consulted before the appointment of George Fernandes as minister in charge of Kashmir affairs?

**A:** Absolutely. And we are in regular interaction with each other.

**Q:** Is Fernandes trying for a political solution?

**A:** Not yet. It is too early for that. There are a number of other problems to which Fernandes is applying his mind. There are the problems of finding shelter for the refugees, jobs for those who are uprooted, etc. Otherwise, the Governor is there like in any other state. He is the leader of the team.



**MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED WITH V.P. SINGH: fall from grace**

is also shrouded in mystery. The young lady, who has shifted to New Delhi since her ordeal and is now an intern at the capital's Loknayak Jaiprakash Hospital, has never spoken—not even to any government agency—about the unfortunate episode. But records reveal that the Mufti had vetoed a proposal from the security forces to mount a commando operation to rescue Rubaiya from the militants' custody. On the contrary, the home minister prodded on the state government to release the five prisoners—all of whom were Pakistan-trained saboteurs or hitmen.

However, the home minister's detractors point out that the Mufti adopted double-standards when the militants held three people, including the vice-chancellor of Kashmir University, as hostages and demanded, in exchange of their lives, the release of one of their men. The Mufti now says that negotiations in this particular case broke down because of instructions from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Amanullah Khan. But there is nothing to suggest that the Mufti had tried to save the three lives with even a fraction of the alacrity with which he had sought to save his daughter's life.

In fact, the Centre has adopted a new hardline approach in Kashmir without much consultations with the Mufti. Now the shots are called by Jagmohan in close consultation with his advisers in Srinagar as well as with home secretary Naresh Chandra, a



RAKESH SAHAJ



GOPAL SHETTY



(TOP) FAROOQ  
ABDULLAH: the accord  
led to his downfall; (LEFT)  
FORCES PATROLLING  
THE VALLEY: uneasy  
calm

seasoned bureaucrat brought into the ministry primarily to make the 'man-tri' redundant.

But the office of the home minister is important in more ways than just controlling insurgency, and the Mufti is coming under increasing criticism on this count, too. Example, he, as the home minister, is a member, together with the Prime Minister and the minister in charge of the relevant ministry, of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC). However, till the end of last week, he was found to be sitting over nearly 60 new appointment files. Commerce minister Arun Nehru found to his surprise that the proposal to appoint S V S. Raghavan as chairman of the apex corporation for STC and MMTC, though cleared by him, was gathering dust for months on the Mufti's desk.

In another instance, Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande was at a loss because the Mufti was delaying the Cabinet decision to ask General K V Krishna Rao, Jagmohan's predecessor-Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, to resign. Finally, of course, Pande managed to get the home minister to sign the relevant letter.

**B**eginning his career as a munsif court lawyer in Anantnag district Kashmir, the Mufti was chosen by

the late D P Dhar to assist Mir Qasim, the then chief minister of the state and Indira Gandhi's answer, till then, to Sheikh Abdullah's challenge. Never a political heavyweight, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed won an election to the state Assembly only once, in 1972, and that too without a contest. He always believed that the Congress should oppose the National Conference (which was Plebiscite Front prior to 1975) in the Valley. However, the Mufti did not oppose the 1986 accord between Farooq



**B**eing a former Congressman, the Mufti has little chance of opening any meaningful dialogue with the militants. That job has lately been entrusted to George Fernandes



Abdullah and Rajiv Gandhi in the beginning. He was a union minister for a long while after the accord. He left Rajiv not on any moral or ideological ground, but only when he was convinced that he had lost weight, in terms of Kashmir politics, because of the accord.

However, there are few options left before him now. Being an old foe of the late Sheikh, and a Congressman of long standing in the Valley, there is little chance of the Mufti being able to open any meaningful dialogue between the Indian authorities and a section of the militants. In fact, that job has lately been entrusted to George Fernandes, who, in his turn, has begun meeting some of the Mufti's bitter opponents in the extremist camp. Though the railway minister has not been lucky so far, but if there is a breakthrough in the near future, the Mufti will certainly not get a share of the cake.

In matters concerning Punjab as well as Assam, where the ULFA insurgents are active, powerful bureaucrats in the capital's administrative network have the last word. In V. P. Singh's scheme of things, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed is a virtual non-entity.

Sumit Mitra/New Delhi



# Is war the solution?

*Pakistan surely cannot be blamed for all our problems*

**R**

eporting on the recent Kanpur riots, *The Hindu* (21 April) wrote: "The trouble started with a minor incident when a scooterist and a cyclist belonging to two

different communities collided on a busy road without any injury to anyone of them. But a heated exchange turned into an exchange of brickbats. Members of both the communities joined the fray and rioting started soon."

Three days later the *The Times of India* reporting on the Mathura riots, said: "People belonging to both the communities this reporter spoke to admitted that there has been an increase in militancy in view of the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid row."

Analysing the causes of a communal riot, down south in Dindigul in early April, the local reporter of *The Hindu* wrote: "The procession of *shilas* (sanctified bricks) for the construction of the Sri Ram Temple in Ayodhya, which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad organised throughout the country on the eve of the elections, roused communal passions among the people of the majority community even in rural areas and Tamil Nadu was no exception."

The three reports indicate how sensitive the communal situation is in the country and what has in the most recent period fuelled distrust among the people of this country. But what is our response? We as a nation have begun to genuinely believe that Pakistan is at the root of all our troubles—terrorism and secessionism in Kashmir and Punjab and communal riots in the rest of the country. Hence, the solution lies in teaching Pakistan a lesson. But who is responsible for terrorism in Assam? China? If so, then declare a

war against China.

We are a nation of self-deceivers. We have no ability to do a rigorous socio-political analysis and identify the real sources of our troubles. Our intellectual lethargy and ideological differences tend to put the entire blame on outsiders for all our problems.

It is not to say that India has no enemies. But these adversaries do not create problems, they only fish in our troubled waters and compound our troubles.

Did Pakistan start the "panga baazi" (instigation) of the Ram Jan-

mabhoomi/Babri Masjid controversy and organised Ram Shila *pooja* all over India. Similarly, did Pakistani propaganda turn Kashmiri Muslims *en masse* against India? Kashmiri Muslims opted to join India in the belief that this country would remain secular. They acceded to Gandhi's India, Nehru's India and not to Golwalkar's India, not to Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's India. When India is increasingly turning communal, that trust is betrayed. Only a secular India can keep Kashmir within it democratically. A communalised India can keep Kashmir only by force—with tanks and a couple of divisions of the army.

A contemporary magazine concluded its reportage on Kashmir: "In Kashmir—where the Centre has invested some Rs 70,000 crores in subsidies, not to speak of the blood of Indian soliders in two wars—the nation faces what is perhaps the gravest challenge to the idea on which its integrity is moored. There are no soft options left. And temporary reverses must not be allowed to invert the process of sustained reclamation. The country can no longer afford to behave like a tenant on a notice to vacate somebody else's property."

If this is the attitude we have towards Kashmir, then God help this 'country'. For this policy does not spell out the ways of winning the minds of the Kashmiri people.

The dangers of such a Kashmir policy are compounded by the talk that Pakistan is engineering communal riots in India. Even Raja Vishwanath Pratap Singh encouraged such a thought. If not countered, it will make every Muslim a suspect and people will rally around the BJP's slogan "save Bharat mata, Hinduism is the solution."●



The Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid: does Pakistan have a hand in it?

**Kashmiri Muslims opted to join India in the belief that this country would remain secular. For only a secular India can keep Kashmir within it.**



# Lady in the dock

*The Tamil Nadu government drags Jayalalitha to court*

**T**he afternoon of 19 April was extremely hot and humid for Madras summer, the oppressive weather helping to build up the tension inside the courtroom of the principal sessions judge, Abdul Jabbar, where the noted criminal lawyer N.T. Vanamamalai was cross-examining a government official.

The courtroom was sparsely attended with a few policemen and a sprinkling of lawyers representing the contestants. But the tension in the atmosphere was palpable. And not entirely unexpectedly. The judge was hearing the defamation case filed by the Tamil Nadu government against the AIADMK general secretary, Jayalalitha Jayaram. And a conviction could have the "Amma" in jail.

The defence counsel, Vanamamalai, is a lawyer of repute and clearly knew he had one of the toughest assignments on hand. He peered into the government files made available to him and shot his question: is it not true that on 14 September last year, the state chief secretary made a note in the file saying that the chief minister's going to the witness box must be avoided at any cost? "Yes", said the witness.

Then came another question—while Arcot N. Veerasamy, the then food minister, had issued a statement on 8 October denying the corruption charges made by Ms Jayalalitha regarding purchase of rice from Andhra Pradesh, did the chief minister issue any such denial statements? The answer: no.

There were several entries in the file which had obviously been changed twice or thrice and clearly showed that the original facts had been altered, Vanamamalai sought to contend. Pat came the reply from the witness: "Ithai naan marukkaren." (I deny this.)

The session continued for about two hours before the judge adjourned further hearing till 28 June and the curtain came down on the second stage of the trial of Jayalalitha, who must be regretting making those allegations against Karunanidhi and



Jayalalitha Jayaram: in trouble

his minister, Arcot Veerasamy, without giving a thought to the legal implications. She could have got away only if she had made the charges on the floor of the House but then she was not attending the Assembly after she was assaulted by the DMK members and ministers during the budget session last year.

On 30 September, Jayalalitha released a seven-page statement to the media, accusing chief minister Karunanidhi of corruption. The prosecutors considered the most objectionable and defamatory the part where she had said that the CM and his minister, Veerasamy, "have swallowed money in the corrupt purchase



of rice, dal and sugar. They have taken money, they are still doing it and have plans to continue with it." The same day, the state government filed a defamation case against Jayalalitha.

On 4 November last year, Jayalalitha appeared before the judge but AIADMK workers disrupted the proceedings of the court. The sessions judge B. Krishnaswamy failed to calm the gathering as the slogan-shouting followers hailed the lady as a revolutionary leader and condemned Karunanidhi.

**A**fter that day's tumultuous proceedings, the judge agreed to the request made by Jayalalitha that she be allowed to be represented by her counsel during the trial and not be present in person. Jayalalitha also told the judge that she would have to attend to various party matters "every moment" of the day.

Public prosecutor L. Babu grabbed the opportunity to oppose Jayalalitha's petition before the Supreme Court seeking the transfer of the case to some other court outside Tamil Nadu on the plea that Karunanidhi was "politically hostile" towards her and she might not get a free and fair trial due to his "vindictive attitude". Of course, the lady also cited other reasons but her critics felt that they were all hollow and aimed only at delaying the legal proceedings launched by Karunanidhi.

Justice L.M. Sharma and Justice P.B. Sawant dismissed the transfer petition on 29 March observing that there appeared to be no reason for Jayalalitha to apprehend that she would not get a fair and impartial trial in Tamil Nadu. Thus, not only did the AIADMK leader fail to get any legal advantage by petitioning the Supreme Court, her action also led to considerable embarrassment, if not anger, among the legal circles as it suggested that she did not trust the judiciary in her home state.

Besides, Jayalalitha made another slip. Having made all those serious allegations against Karunanidhi, she did not cite him as a party to the said petition. "The court does not pass a



**M. Karunanidhi: sweet revenge?**

judgement behind the back, without hearing the person against whom the allegations are made in a petition," said a senior Madras lawyer. "That Karunanidhi's name was not included as a party in the petition by Jayalalitha was a fundamental flaw."

Other apparently unrelated issues which the petition touched upon in the attempt to justify the request for transfer of the case outside Tamil Nadu included the observation that the ruling DMK managed to form a government in spite of getting only 33 per cent of the total votes polled. "... (This) is not relevant to the purpose of the issue to be decided in this

**MGR had locked up Karunanidhi in the early Eighties. Now the DMK chief must be hoping to throw the legendary AIADMK leader's confidante behind bars**

petition. It is significant that the DMK party got as many as 146 out of 234 seats in the Assembly," said the counter petition filed by the state public prosecutor, Babu.

The Supreme Court dismissing the transfer petition must have jolted the AIADMK leadership, for Jayalalitha is no longer issuing statements attacking Karunanidhi or his government. She is now content with letting her lieutenants hit out against the DMK rulers.

Karunanidhi, for his part, appears to be serious that his prosecutor builds up a solid case against his arch-rival. True, it is still a long way off before the judge delivers his judgement—besides, there are other escape avenues such as appeals to the higher courts—but it is apparent that Jayalalitha has been pushed on the defensive.

Legal experts feel that the manner in which Jayalalitha reacted to the government's move only indicates the confusion within her camp. For example, when she made her appearance in the sessions court, she organised an agitation to demonstrate her political might. Later, in the petition before the Supreme Court seeking the transfer of the case outside Tamil Nadu, she argued that should the case against her be heard in Tamil Nadu, there would not be a peaceful and fair trial.

The AIADMK founder and former chief minister M.G. Ramachandran had locked up Karunanidhi, then leader of the Opposition, in the Madras Central Jail for over two months during the early Eighties, in connection with an agitation against his government. Now that MGR is no more, the DMK chief must be hoping to throw the legendary AIADMK leader's confidante behind bars.

At the moment, the outcome of this legal battle seems uncertain. But the government is confident that it will be able to pin down Jayalalitha and have her convicted. What Karunanidhi is unsure of is whether the episode will make a political martyr out of the AIADMK leader.

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**



KHUSHWANT SINGH

# Sending English to coventry



For the benefit of Mulayam Singh Yadav, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, let me explain that the expression means exactly what he means

to do with the English language in India viz. banish it. Let me reassure him that neither he nor anyone else can *hatao angrezi* from Bharat because it has become a *desi bhasha* as much as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam or any of the other languages recognised by our Constitution. And though a very small minority use it, their number runs into millions. More than the national language Hindi, it is our means of communication between our diverse peoples. It is more used in the two Houses of Parliament than all the other regional languages put together. The same applies to the Supreme Court and all the states' High Courts. It is the language of science, medicine, engineering and technology, and higher learning. None of our regional languages have anything like an adequate vocabulary required to keep pace with advancement in these disciplines. The surest way of arresting progress and putting the clock back is to try to ban the use of English.

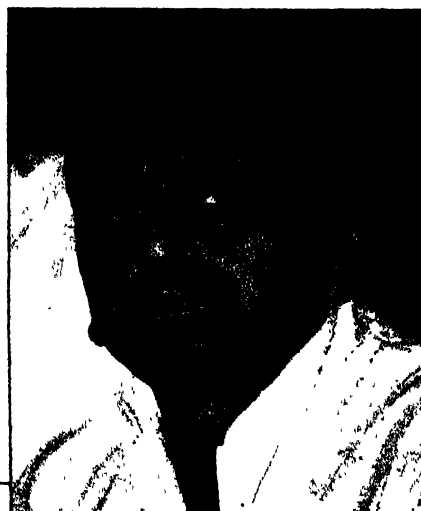
I do not know how educated a man is Mulayam Singh Yadav. Whatever his academic qualifications, his reading of history and linguistics must be very poor. He should know that every invader tries to impose his language on a conquered people. The Aryans imposed Sanskrit, the Muslims imposed Turki, Arabic and Persian, the English imposed English. Since the English ruled the entire subcontinent of India, the impact of their language became an all-India phenomenon. It made us conscious of being one nation. We used it to fight English colonial domination. All the great leaders of our freedom movement used it more than the regional languages so that their voices could be heard across the length and breadth of the country.

And abroad. It became, and remains to this day our one window to the outside world.

Yadav evidently regards the use of English as unpatriotic. It is not. On the contrary what is unpatriotic is his brash, undemocratic and ill-conceived *diktat* that English will no longer be used as the medium of instruction and that all official correspondence will hereafter be in Hindi. Surely he is not as much of a green horn in politics as not to know what reactions will be in the southern states, particularly Tamil Nadu! What about people of my generation of Indians who were largely brought up on Urdu cannot read Hindi?

Evidently Mulayam *bhaiyya* is not aware of what is happening in the world. He should know that even in the Soviet Republics next to their own regional languages the students are opting for English because English is no longer the language spoken in the United Kingdom, countries of the Commonwealth and the United States, but by far the most widely used language in the world. We Indians have nothing to be ashamed of the fact that many of us who use it, speak it and write it better than people whose mother tongue it is. English is England's greatest bequest to India and India's greatest national asset. I for

**Mulayam Singh Yadav: Irrational stand**



one have never hesitated in saying that though my mother couldn't speak a word of it, my mother tongue is English because I can express myself better in it than in Punjabi, Urdu or Hindi. And I love it. If ever a time comes when Mulayam Singh Yadav writes to me in Hindi, I will reply to him in English even if thereafter he bans my entry into Uttar Pradesh. However, I am glad to note that when it came to his own son, he sent him to an English medium school.

## Police efficiency

Virendra Kumar Massey of Ghaziabad sends the following true story of his experience at a doctor's clinic. He writes

"A few days ago I went to see my doctor. When I entered the waiting room, I saw two policemen sitting with a beautiful black puppy. The doctor was busy. I took my number from the counter and while waiting started playing with the puppy. After about half an hour I entered the doctor's clinic. One of the policemen also came in and said that Inspector Sahib had sent him to find out if his daughter bitten by the puppy, needed an injection. The doctor asked whether the injection was for the daughter or the dog. The constable answered that it was for the daughter. The doctor asked to see the girl's wound before he could suggest anything. The inspector had not sent the daughter but had sent the puppy which was outside. The doctor asked him to take the puppy away and bring the daughter."

"I could not control my laughter. On being asked the reason I told the doctor that he had not understood the psychology of the police. It was in their blood to catch the culprit and not attend to the victim. The policeman had, therefore, brought the culprit, the puppy, and not the victim: whether the victim lives or dies is not their concern, the culprit must be caught and the culprit was there." ●



# A cop under fire

*Kiran Bedi is indicted by an enquiry commission*

**A**gitations and *dharnas* are a common enough phenomenon in Uttar Pradesh. But the one organised in Ghaziabad on 21 April was unique. For one, the protestors were lawyers but more interestingly, the target of their ire was no politician but Kiran Bedi, the high-profile woman IPS officer. Bedi was the chief guest of a function at a local college, but she decided to keep away from the ceremony since the lawyers sat in protest outside the college campus, determined not to allow the cop to attend the function.

The *dharna* organised by the Ghaziabad lawyers is not an isolated instance. Members of the bar have stepped up their campaign against Kiran Bedi ever since Justice D P Wadhwa of the Delhi High Court censured the cop for her action nearly two years ago. The incident involved the arrest and handcuffing of a young lawyer, Rajesh Agnihotri, on charges of pickpocketing. Soon after Agnihotri was paraded in public with handcuffs, lawyers in the capital marched in a procession towards the office of Kiran Bedi, then deputy commissioner of north Delhi. Soon the lawyers were joined by Congress activists and together they staged a demonstration outside Bedi's chamber.

But even as the agitators were shouting slogans, Kiran Bedi ordered the police to disperse the gathering. A lathi-charge followed in which many lawyers sustained injuries. The incident created a furore in the capital and for two months the lawyers of Delhi struck work in protest. They returned to the bar only after the government transferred Bedi to the relatively unimportant Narcotics Control Bureau and announced that a commission of enquiry headed by Justice Wadhwa would go into the conduct of Kiran Bedi. After over a year of investigations, Justice Wadhwa has submitted his report which has come as a severe

blow to the courageous police officer. For, besides indicting her for professional misconduct, the judge has accused Bedi of misusing her office for "personal vendetta". While the arrest of Rajesh Agnihotri was, according to Justice Wadhwa, justified and lawful, the handcuffing in public was not. The judge then goes on to analyse the conduct of Ms Bedi after the "reprehensible incident". And here too she comes in for criticism. Justice Wadhwa felt that she acted "dishonestly" and Bedi's actions like calling a press conference to justify her conduct was

aback by the report," said a distraught Kiran Bedi, adding, "Now it is for the people to decide if they want to depend on the police for their security or not. The public must decide under what circumstances a police officer's action can be termed an excess." Bedi is most upset that the judge concluded that all her colleagues who deposed in her favour were "under her spell".

The question now is: how will the authorities react to the report? Justice Wadhwa has recommended departmental action against Bedi, though the lawyers would prefer to settle the



**"Now it is for the people to decide if they want to depend on the police for their security or not," says Kiran Bedi**

only an exercise in "personal advertisement" in the face of a crisis.

The strictures have taken Kiran Bedi by surprise. She was keenly following the case all through and had the backing of her colleagues. The former police chief of Delhi, Ved Marwah, had even deposed before the commission in her favour. Moreover, it was believed that Bedi had the support of political heavyweights like former home minister Buta Singh. Even the solicitor general of India, B Ramaswamy, had reportedly assured Kiran Bedi that nothing would come out of the enquiry.

"Yes, I must admit I was taken

matter in court. The present police commissioner of Delhi, Vijay Karan, declined to comment on the report saying that in such enquiries, police officers can easily be blamed.

But the woman who is at the centre of the controversy seems least perturbed. "I am capable of taking such things in my stride," she said. And there is every reason for Bedi to feel confident because even in the past, police officials indicted by law courts got away easily. Meanwhile in the capital there is talk of shifting Kiran Bedi out of Delhi to either Punjab or Kashmir, till the storm blows over.

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



# WAR?

## India gets tough with Pakistan

**I**t was billed as a mini-summit meeting—one that would end the tension building up on both sides of the India-Pakistan border. When Inder Kumar Gujral, India's urbane foreign minister, met his Pakistani counterpart, Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, in New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel, he wanted to talk of peace. "I am certain that the people of the two countries do not want war and that we can settle our problems in a civilised manner," Gujral told journalists shortly before the meeting.

And when he came out of the summit, his mood was still one of guarded optimism. While Khan had given no blanket assurances, he had repeated Pakistan's insistence that it was not providing financial and military support to the Kashmir terrorists. Pakistan did not want war, he had said.

The very next day, Gujral learned that his optimism was misplaced.

As far as Yaqub Khan was concerned, the summit might not have taken place at all. In sharp contrast to the conciliatory stand Gujral claimed to have detected at their meeting, Khan went on the offensive.

- He told the press that Indian troops had unleashed a reign of terror on the hapless people of Kashmir. He spoke of "atrocities" and of "gang rapes."

- War, he said, was not inevitable but seemed possible because India was creating a fear psychosis and being needlessly aggressive while falsely



**Kashmir:** is Pakistan waging a 'proxy war' here?

accusing Pakistan of arming the Kashmiris.

- He told the Bush administration that he did not think that India's problems with Pakistan could be resolved bilaterally. He would prefer it, he said, if America or some other third party entered the picture as a mediator.

- During a meeting with James Baker, US secretary of state, he reiterated his demand for a United Nations-

sponsored plebiscite on Kashmir to give the people of the state a right to choose their destiny.

Nearly all of this ran counter to the impression he had given Gujral at their meeting. India's position is that the 1972 Shimla Agreement supersedes all earlier UN resolutions and so the plebiscite is no longer an issue. Moreover, India wants a bilateral resolution of all disputes and opposes any third party mediation. And final-



ly, Gujral and Khan had—according to Gujral, at least—agreed to moderate all public utterances to reduce tension

Within 24 hours, Khan had gone against every single one of India's most central positions

In some ways, the Gujral-Khan summit was the last hope for reducing the tension that has kept growing between the two countries over the last four months. Once it failed, the gloves were off

Gujral was the first to react. At a

defence of the country when across the western border there is a single-minded devotion to building up armaments," he declared

At a public meeting in Lucknow, he attacked Pakistan for training terrorists and secessionists. "The Pakistani government," he said, "was providing such sophisticated weapons as anti-tank mines, rocket-launchers and machine-guns." India could never tolerate this, he declared, and warned that Pakistan had moved army units, including tanks and radars, to locations near the border

If such rhetoric suggested a new tough line, then an official briefing by the foreign ministry in New Delhi confirmed it. Making the by now routine denunciations of Khan's volte-face, the ministry's spokesman raged: "Let there be no doubt that the Government of India will not tolerate infringement of its sovereignty and integrity and will take appropriate measures to prevent such occurrences."

What were these 'measures'? Did this mean that India would now agree to the long-standing BJP demand that it chase terrorists into Pakistan and destroy their training camps? "We rule out nothing," said the spokesman.

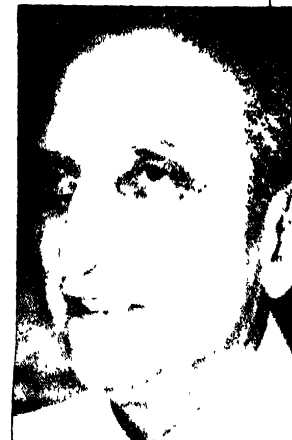
It was a notable shift of stance and escalated the war of nerves. To date India has always said that it would not make incursions into Pakistani territory. But now, the foreign ministry was willing to consider this possibility.

What would the next step be? War?

Or are we already at war? In one respect," says Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), "Pakistan has been fighting a proxy war for at least the last three months. To ask whether there will be a war implies that we are ignoring this reality."

According to Singh, Pakistan's support for

the Kashmiri militants and its encouragement to them to secede have already reached the stage where the term 'war' (or at least 'proxy war') could be used. "The Pakistani Prime Minister not only says that they are supporting terrorist activities in Kashmir, but that they intend to keep supporting them. That is meant to convey to those in Kashmir who are not yet with the terrorists that if they were to keep fighting long enough and hard enough, there is an external power which will come to their assistance."



Inder Gujral (left) and Yaqub Khan: unsuccessful meeting

Even by Singh's definition, it is difficult to say when Pakistan's support for the militants reached the stage when it became an act of war. Pakistan has always had links with secessionist outfits in Kashmir and it is no secret that the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has been financed by Pakistan almost from the time that it was set up.

But it was not till just over a year ago that Pakistani assistance to the militants reached alarming levels. (There are some 30 terrorist organisations in Kashmir, of which roughly 15

are committed to an independent Kashmir and the rest to union with Pakistan.) The former minister of state for home affairs, P. Chidambaram, told Parliament that India was seriously concerned about Pakistan's support to the JKLF and the foreign ministry launched a protest.

But it was not till July 1989 that Pakistan began to distance itself from

**The Gujral-Khan summit was the last hope for reducing tension. Once it failed, the gloves were off**

press conference in London, on his way back from New York, he attacked Khan for violating the understanding reached between the two foreign ministers. And then, he issued what some took to be a threat. Pakistan, he said, had its own separatist movements in Sind and Baluchistan; "such tactics could affect its own stability."

In New Delhi, Prime Minister V. P. Singh was more aggressive. He would, he told reporters, recommend an increase in the defence budget. "There is no other way of dealing with the



its commitments under the Shimla Agreement. The hostility had increased to levels that were unprecedented in recent memory by December 1989 when Pakistan carried out a massive military exercise code-named Zarb-e-Momin (Strike of the Faithful) in which over 50 per cent of the armed forces were deployed. Indian intelligence was concerned, not so much by the size of the exercise as by

two other aspects. First of all, the operation had an unusually high media profile, which only made sense if the purpose was to sensitise the people to a war scenario and pump up patriotic sentiment. And secondly, there were worrying reports that soldiers had been told to conserve equipment. Why should the Pakistanis wish to do this unless they knew that a war was just around the corner?

By January 1990, after this government took office, the Pakistanis became more open in their support to the Kashmiri militants. Accordingly, the incidence of terrorism shot up.

Moreover, Pakistan also began a major diplomatic offensive to try and isolate India. Saudi Arabia expressed its support for the Kashmiri militants, Iran cancelled a visit by Inder Gujral, and even the leaders of Bangladesh

## Who wants war?

*The Cabinet is divided and V.P. Singh has yet to make up his mind*

**A**s Congressmen never tire of pointing out, there is a certain poignancy to the situation that the V.P. Singh government finds itself in. Throughout last year's election campaign, it kept saying that it wanted better relations with our neighbours and would restore peace to Punjab and Kashmir.

In fact, Kashmir has got worse, Punjab has remained about the same and relations with Pakistan have plummeted. Because the situation has caught the government unawares, its responses have sometimes seemed contradictory. ("Who are we to believe?" sneers former foreign minister Natwar Singh, "V.P. Singh when he says he won't talk to the Pakistanis till they stop interfering in Kashmir or Inder Gujral when he goes to New York to talk to them?")

At present, the Cabinet is divided on how best to proceed on the issue. At one level, there is the well-publicised disagreement over Kashmir. Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammad Khan and Mufti Mohammad Sayeed all believe that Governor Jagmohan should be

backed. Two months ago, V.P. Singh wondered if a softer approach might not yield greater dividends and appointed George Fernandes minister for Kashmir. Fernandes' approach differed drastically from Jagmohan's and last week, V.P. Singh finally gave in to pressure from the Mufti and told the minister for Kashmir not to visit Srinagar during Eid. At this, Fernandes flew into a rage and reportedly threatened to resign.

The same kind of division into hawks and doves persists in the regime's approach to Pakistan. Nehru and Arif believe that India should go to war. At a recent Cabinet meeting, Arif was vocal about this. "Instead of facing a civil war in Kashmir and Punjab for five years, it is better to face a full-fledged war with Pakistan for five days," he stated. While Arif and the Mufti are united in their approach to the Kashmir problem, they disagree on the subject of war. The Mufti believes that it is not in India's interest to do battle with Pakistan.

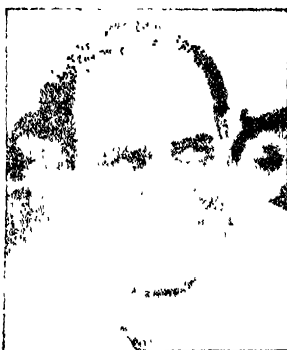
He is backed by several other

Cabinet ministers. Fernandes thinks the Mufti is right on Pakistan, but wrong on Kashmir. Madhu Dandavate is concerned, as finance minister, about the ruinous effect a war would have on the economy and Inder Gujral, a great believer in compromise and peaceful coexistence, thinks that the situation can be resolved through negotiations. Nobody knows quite what Devi Lal's views on the subject are, but in his frequent utterances on the topic, he has given the impression that he doesn't want war either. (Though cynics say this has more to do with a dislike of Arun Nehru who is a hawk than with any love for Pakistan.)

So far, neither Prime Minister V.P. Singh, who is also defence minister, nor his minister of state, Dr Raja Ramanna, the father of India's nuclear deterrent, has expressed any clear view. On 10 April, the Prime Minister intervened in the parliamentary debate on defence allocation and told the country to be prepared for a war with Pakistan.

The statement created a sensa

**Arun Nehru:** believes in war



**V.P. Singh:** hawkish posture



**Arif Mohammad Khan:** talking tough



**Mufti Mohammad Sayeed:** soft approach





declared that as their country owed its existence to self-determination, they were committed to supporting the concept of self-determination everywhere else in the subcontinent.

Things suddenly began to look very grim.

**A**ccording to Yaqub Khan, it is India that is now creating a war hysteria. Such statements outrage the

tion as the Raja had not previously discussed it with the Cabinet (which had met a few days before), with the defence secretary or the three chiefs of army staff. The external affairs ministry too was alarmed because it feared that the rhetoric would lose India friends in the West (it probably did. London's *The Independent*, in a reaction typical of western media, called it an "extraordinarily hawkish harangue") and lead to the country being perceived as the aggressor in the event of any conflict actually occurring.

V.P. Singh then appeared to backtrack somewhat three days later when he issued clarifications at a meeting of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party. He told chief ministers as well, that he had no intention of declaring war when he spoke in Parliament.

This conciliatory approach then became the Government of India's official stand. Two weeks ago, Inder Gujral held a press conference in London (he was on his way to New York to meet Sahibzada Yaqub Khan). He was asked about the possibility of war. "A good foreign minister never speaks of war," he murmured, adding that he was hopeful that everything could be resolved across the table.

In a week's time the hawkish approach had returned (see main story). V.P. Singh was back to talking tough and promising to increase the defence budget and within the Cabinet, there was an increasing recognition of the reality that negotiations alone would not cause the Pakistanis to back down.

This, of course, does not mean

that more ministers want war—nobody is even really sure if the Prime Minister desires war or whether his statements are part of some subtle strategy. It merely suggests that a hawkish approach will now dominate the Indian government's responses to Pakistan.

In all this, V.P. Singh will keep three factors in mind.

- A minority government cannot survive a long drawn out conflict in which it suffers early reverses. Victory (or the perception of victory) must be immediate.
- While there is a growing belief that Pakistan needs to be taught a lesson, India has still not been gripped by 1971-style war hysteria. If the cost of a war amounts to pushing the economy back by a decade's worth of development, then some people might wonder if this is an excessive price to pay to restore law and order in Kashmir.
- There is always the Muslim factor. While in 1965 and 1971, there were no communal ramifications in India, the situation could be very different in 1990 if Kashmiri Muslims are seen to be supporting Pakistan. Several Muslim Janata Dal MPs have told the Prime Minister that the communal situation in India is too fragile to survive a war. And the Shahi Imam has also sent messages to V.P. Singh advising him to avoid war.



### The Indo-Pak border:

*hostility mounts*

external affairs ministry. Says an official spokesman: "For three months we were extremely restrained. But now, how long can we ignore the provocation?" It was their PM who came to Azad Kashmir and said *'Goli chalo, jehad lagao'*. It was she who set up a fund and made tax-exempt donations to it. It was Nawaz Sharif, the CM of their Punjab, who set up a rival fund to 'liberate' Kashmir. It is Pakistan that sponsors Amanullah Khan, a man wanted by the British for the murder of an Indian diplomat. They gave him a passport and let him go to America. When the state department agreed with us that what he is doing is tantamount to terrorism and cancelled his visa, it was Pakistan that piped up, 'Oh, he's an important person, please treat him with care'. How can they say that we are being provocative?"

The anger is perceptible. India feels that Pakistan is trying to win a major victory without firing a single shot. As long as it is the Kashmiris who engage in terrorism and threaten to secede, the cost to Pakistan in terms of lives is nil. Nor is the enterprise particularly expensive. And yet, the Pakistanis get what they want. Should Kashmir break away, then they will have amputated an integral part of India without even having to go to war. And should the might of the Indian state prevent the Kashmiris from seceding, the Pakistanis will still have succeeded in destabilising India.

"In my opinion," says Air Com-





**The line of control:** *escalating tension*

modore Jasjit Singh, "the Pakistanis are perfectly happy with a proxy war. It is a low-cost option. They don't really want a full-scale war."

This is an opinion that many in Delhi's decision-making circles share and it has guided Indian foreign policy over the last month. The argument runs as follows:

"Pakistan has nothing to gain from war. The best it could do is win more territory in Kashmir. But it has already managed to push the Valley to the brink of secession without starting a war, so this is hardly an appreciable gain. On the other hand, it has a lot to lose. Firstly, it can't afford a war. Secondly, should things go badly, then Benazir is certain to be toppled just as Ayub Khan was replaced shortly after the 1965 war and Yahya Khan was thrown out in 1971. Thirdly, even if the war is a 1965-style stalemate, Benazir would still lose out because any military adventure would necessarily involve concentrating more power in the hands of the generals."

Therefore, policy-makers believe, the best way to end the proxy war is to threaten Pakistan with an all-out war. Once the Pakistanis realise that India is not scared of a fight, they will back down.

V. P. Singh's aggressive parliamentary intervention on 10 April 1990, was based on this view. It was his way of telling the Pakistanis that if they wanted to keep creating trouble in

Kashmir, then they should be ready for a full-scale confrontation.

**H**as this approach worked? Yes and no. Air Commodore Jasjit Singh points out that "after the PM made a statement in Parliament asking the nation to be psychologically prepared for war, Benazir Bhutto has not made any statement except 'We do not want a war and it is not in our interest'. But before that she was very aggressive and spoke of launching a thousand year war."

On the other hand, the proxy war shows no signs of ending and Yaqub Khan's behaviour in New York suggests that Pakistan still intends to internationalise the issue and embarrass India. So, if V. P. Singh hoped that by threatening a war he would stop Benazir from talking in terms of one, then he has been successful. But if he thought that the fear of a full-scale conflict would make the Pakistanis rethink their Kashmir policy, then the endeavour has failed.

Part of the problem is that Pakistan regards this as a golden opportunity to teach India a lesson. It perceives that a faction-ridden minority government will be unable to function cohesively or even construct an adequate response. Hence the persistent waging of the proxy war.

Some observers believe that the V. P. Singh regime's performance has proved the Pakistanis right. Says Nat-

war Singh, who was minister of state for external affairs in the last Congress(I) government: "There is a complete absence of clarity in Indian foreign policy today. Mr V. P. Singh says there will be no talks with Pakistan as long as they don't stop interfering in Punjab and Kashmir. Mr Gujral says no, he is going to meet them. India is not against talks. So what exactly is the Indian stand?"

Natwar Singh's view—and that of much of the Congress(I)—is that V. P. Singh talks tough but fails to follow this up with any kind of action. Gujral, on the other hand, is too conciliatory and consequently, the likes of Yaqub run circles around him. Says Singh: "The fact that the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan met in New York to discuss Kashmir is itself sad. We have never discussed this for the 25 years since 1965. Either Kashmir is an integral part of India or it is not. We maintain it is. Period. Why don't we discuss Tamil Nadu with Premadasa otherwise? Or Assam with Ne Win?"

Others deny that the regime's stand has been contradictory or confused. Says the BJP's Jaswant Singh, a former service officer: "I don't think we have a weak government in Delhi at all. And for Benazir Bhutto, whose own internal position is shaky, to be commenting on the stability or decisiveness of the present Indian government is a gross error."





**At the Siachen glacier:** but the real war has yet to begin

**S**o, what happens next? Will the impasse continue or will it lead to war? One view is that the longer India delays going to war, the more it stands to lose. It is now clear that Pakistan will not stop aiding and arming the Kashmiri terrorists regardless of how many protest notes India sends. It is as clear that India is increasingly isolated internationally. The Muslim world will not support India on an issue that involves the right to self-determination of a Muslim majority state. And in most of the West, there is a growing perception that the people of Kashmir would much rather secede and that India is holding them back by force.

But so far, the majority in the Cabinet (*see box*) is for peace and most politicians believe that India will stop short of actually sending in the tanks. "There will not be a war," asserts Natwar Singh. "The international diplomatic panorama is such that it will look very peculiar, with the rest of the world laying down arms and trying to avoid confrontation, that our two countries should decide to go to war. Secondly, the US and the USSR are now improving relations. They would want to avoid taking sides in a war. If a discussion took place in the Security Council, the Soviets would have to back us and the Americans would have to back Pakistan."

Certainly, the international scene has changed dramatically in the last

two years. The Russians in the post-Afghanistan era are trying to improve relations with Pakistan and regard India as less central to their world view. And the Americans are moving away from the pro-Pakistan posture they were forced to adopt while the Soviets were in Afghanistan. Consequently, the Bush administration listened to Yaqub last week in New York and Washington but it did not encourage him. The US made it clear that it would not be a third party in the kind of settlement mooted by the Pakistanis.

**Benazir Bhutto:** an angry young woman



nis and commended the Shimla Agreement as a means of resolving bilateral disputes. In effect, this suggested that they accepted India's stand that the UN resolution calling for an internationally supervised plebiscite was now irrelevant and that the bilateral framework of the Shimla agreement had replaced it.

**E**verybody accepts that a war could break out nevertheless, without either side actually wanting one. "The possibility of war exists primarily because of two factors," says the BJP's Jaswant Singh. The first is the inherent autonomy that events have over human beings. Pakistan's aim is to manage a low-level insurgency in the valley of Kashmir to cause great discomfort to India. And if India is unable to resolve the issue internally, then possibly to achieve the aim without using the army. The danger is that an insurgency gathers its own momentum and can never really be managed.

Therein lies the first danger, continues Jaswant Singh, "of Pakistan's calculations going awry and things getting out of hand. The second danger is if India manages to control the law and order situation. Pakistan will then get desperate and could react in an irrational manner."

It is the second danger that worries many people. Says Air Commodore Jasjit Singh: "For the last three weeks, the Pakistani Opposition is not entering the government. But suppose we manage to get things back to normal, then the Opposition will take up the issue again and put the government on the defensive. Then it will be forced to do something."

In such a situation, the logical approach, for a belligerent Benazir, would be to put pressure on the line of actual control. In its recent statements, Pakistan has indicated that it does not regard the Shimla Agreement (signed by Benazir's father) as binding in all respects. Instead, it keeps going back to the original UN resolution that called for a plebiscite. This means that the line of actual control which both countries have recognised as the border since 1972 is now regarded as just another arbitrary division on a map. Pakistan could therefore make incursions past this line and force India into a position where it has to react.

Alternatively, the pressure could come from the Indian side. So far, contrary to Pakistan's claims, there has been little war hysteria in India.



# But would India win?

*Probably, but not as easily as is generally believed*

**M**ost Indian political debate on the current crisis in India-Pakistan relations is guided by one central assumption: if there was a war, India would win. Pakistan knows this, goes the argument, so it will fight shy of an actual conflict and prefer a proxy war, that is, it will finance terrorist and separatist outfits.

But is it really fair to assume that India is certain to win any war?

Pakistan follows a dual policy with regard to this question. At international fora and in the western media, it portrays itself as a small neighbour terrorised by a regional superpower (read: 'bully-boy'). Its only quarrel with India, it says, relates to the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir whose people would quite happily secede if the Indian armed forces let them.

Within Pakistan, however, the government adopts a very different policy. It talks of "jihad", of revenge for the 1971 defeat and of the ability of the Pakistani army to crush the Indians any time it so desires. Last year, Zarb-e-Momin, a military exercise, was given an extraordinarily high media profile and the articles all emphasised the Pakistani army's superiority.

So, the certainty of victory is an assumption that both sides make

While only a war can settle the dispute over the strength of each country's armed forces, certain facts are self-evident.

- India has a marginal superiority over Pakistan in deployable forces. But it is misleading to talk in terms of numbers. Explains Air Commodore Jasjit Singh of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis: "India really has to maintain three different types of armies. One for the plains of Punjab and the desert of Rajasthan, one for the Himalayas and one for the jungles of the east. Neither of the three armies is switchable."

Therefore, while it is true to say that India could withdraw any of the 11 mountain divisions deployed in the Himalayas in the event of a war because the Chinese would not be a factor in the conflict, the point is that the mountain divisions do not have the equipment to fight in the plains.

Pakistan has two fronts to guard, with India and with Afghanistan. But firstly, it is easier to switch armies between the two borders and secondly, it has reduced its deployment vis-a-vis Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal.

- Both sides have state-of-the-art equipment. The Indian Army,

however, believes that Pakistan's recent shopping sprees have given it the edge in terms of sophisticated weaponry but argues, nevertheless, that this edge is not enough to tilt the balance in an armed conflict.

Certainly, Pakistan's equipment has some drawbacks compared to India's. For instance, it has tested its first set of surface-to-surface missiles and not found them particularly accurate. On the other hand, India has not only successfully tested its own but the first deployments of the Prithvi missile may come about by the time war breaks out. (But if the Chinese sell the Pakistani M-9 surface-to-surface missiles, then this advantage could disappear.) However, the Agni missile, which could have given India a clear edge, has been the victim of blocked development.

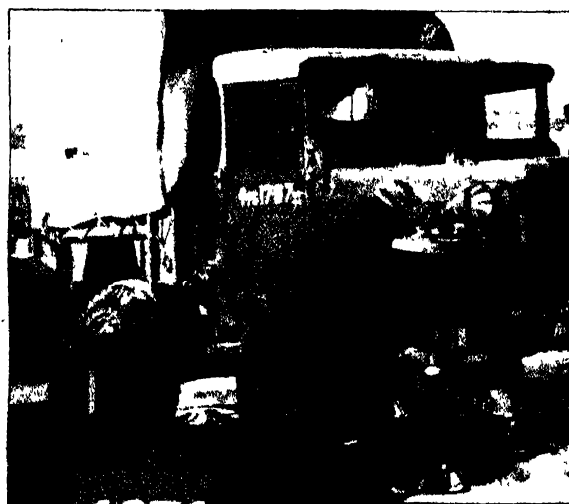
Even with deep penetration aircraft (such as the F-16), the Pakistani advantage may well be illusory. Though such planes have an extended range, India is so large that many major targets are too far off. Because of Pakistan's relatively small size, however, Indian aircraft can reach many major targets.

- While the hawks in Delhi talk in

## When India went to war with Pakistan



**1965**



**1971**



terms of a "five day war rather than a five year period of terrorism", most military experts regard it as extremely unlikely that it will be all over in under a week. They consider it likely that in the early stages, Pakistan might even have some successes. Says Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora (Retd), the victor of Bangladesh, "Regardless of whether in the initial stages we have a success or a reverse—and we must be prepared to face a reverse—the government must be determined to fight till the Pakistanis are on their knees."

A long drawn out war is an advantage and a disadvantage. Says General Aurora "Our size, our industrial base, our manpower and even material resources are much bigger." But, as Air Commodore Jasjit Singh warns, this could be a disadvantage as well. "We must remember that the Indians are a little weak in their staying power. This is something the other side will count on. Indians will finally start disagreeing with each other as to how to handle the situation. It is our staying power that will matter."

• In 1965 Pakistani regulars in mufti and locals from Pakistan



	Total	Deployable against Pakistan	Total	Deployable against India
<b>ARMY</b>				
<b>Corps</b>	10	7	9	8
<b>Infantry divisions</b>	31	18	18	16
<b>Armoured divisions</b>	2	2	2	2
<b>Mechanised divisions</b>	1	1	—	—
<b>Independent brigades</b>	17	10	14	10
<b>Tanks</b>	2,600	2,300	2,300	2,100
<b>AIR FORCE</b>				
<b>Combat Squadrons</b>	37	25	24	21
<b>Combat aircraft</b>	700	—	400	—
<b>NAVY</b>				
<b>(major ships)</b>				
<b>Aircraft carriers</b>	2	1	—	—
<b>Submarines</b>	15	15	6	6
<b>Destroyers</b>	5	5	8	8
<b>Frigates</b>	11	11	10	10

(Source: Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis)

Occupied Kashmir (POK or Azad Kashmir as the other side calls it) crossed over the border. The intention was to foment disturbances before the army launched a full-scale war.

The strategy backfired. The Kashmiri people nabbed the infiltrators and handed them over to the local police. By the time that war broke out, the population of Kashmir had more than adequately demonstrated its preference for India.

Would that happen in 1990?

In the final analysis this could be Pakistan's trump card. Already, the Pakistanis are saying that the parallel is not with 1965 but with 1971. That was when the Indian Army counted on the support of the people of East Pakistan to create Bangladesh.

Off the record Indian military sources concede that this will be a major problem but argue that they can cope with it. After all, they say, the war will not be restricted to Kashmir alone. India could easily move into Lahore (in 1965, the army nearly got there) and create problems in one of Pakistan's most important cities. That, they believe, would traumatise Pakistan enough to outweigh any benefits that it might receive from the support of the Kashmiri people.

But that could change radically if there were a few more dramatic terrorist strikes. Then, to demonstrate to the country that it was still in charge, the V P Singh government could order the army to enter Pakistan territory and demolish terrorist-training camps (the option it refused to rule out last week). Faced with such operations, Pakistan would have to respond and war could well be the consequence.

As the week ended, New Delhi was still talking tough and the mood in the Cabinet was hardening. The Kashmir situation appeared to go from bad to worse as the two ministers who shared responsibility for the state (George Fernandes and home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed) squabbled. India's diplomatic initiative had failed after Yaqub's outbursts in America. Pakistan's appeal to the United States to not deport JKLF terrorist Amanullah Khan suggested that it saw no need to be coy about its support to Kashmiri militants.

V P Singh continued to rage and the foreign ministry blustered. But there was no getting away from one fact: it looked as though Pakistan was winning the proxy war.

Could India reverse that trend without resorting to a full-scale war? Nobody was certain any longer. •

**Nirmal Mitra with Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**





**Police victim being rushed to hospital: brutal retaliation; and Ganesh Man Singh: wants the status quo ante restored**

**T**here was little time to exult in the victory savour. The triumph bask in the glow of goodwill and approbation. No sooner had K.P. Bhattarai's council of ministers been sworn in on 19 April, Kathmandu was aflame yet again. For Prime Minister Bhattarai—whose government was rudely shaken by a police revolt and a complete collapse of the law and order system—it was a testing baptism by fire. For a while it appeared as if his government would be unable to defuse the situation and that Nepal's transition to a fully-fledged democracy was in danger of floundering.

However, at the end of last week, the multi-party government of the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front had established a modicum of control. The police, who stayed off duty for a whole three days, were back at work. The violence—which left six policemen and about twice as many civilians dead—had subsided. And although the Kathmandu valley continued to be placed under a dusk-to-dawn curfew, there was the feeling that a degree of normalcy and peace had been restored. Said Bhattarai to *SUNDAY*: "We may not have yet won over the police completely, but we are happy about the speed with which the situation was defused."

# MUTINY

*A police revolt threatens Nepal's new democratic government*

Although few could have foreseen that Bhattarai's government would have to deal with a crisis of such dimensions so soon, there were ominous signals even before he was sworn in. On 16 April, the day that the then Prime Minister Manich Man Singh Shrestha submitted his resignation and King Birendra dissolved the Rashtriya Panchayat (or Parliament), some 600 huts were set alight in Patan, the town that adjoins Kathmandu. The people were convinced that this was the work of the feared and hated *mandalays*—Nepal's equivalent of *goondas*, who operate with the patronage of the *panchayat* (or *panchayat* members).

During the next two days, there was even more trouble. As those who lost their huts grieved, the zonal commissioner's office (which was later burnt down) rumours began making the rounds in Kathmandu that the *mandalays* were planning a major offensive to destabilise the government. At

the same time, the people's suspicions about the police—who are regarded as pro-*panchayat* and soft on the *mandalays*—hardened. There was the feeling that the force would not intervene to resist the *mandalays* if they chose to go on the rampage.

But it was only after the Bhattarai ministry was sworn in on 19 April that things really

took a turn for the worse. On 20 April, a number of shops were looted in the Kathmandu valley, shopkeepers beaten up and many houses burnt. Various people reported having received threatening messages as armed *mandalays* took to the streets. The day after, the Nepali Congress' secretary-general G.P. Koirala, appealed to the people to form "vigilance groups to check the anti-social activities of the reactionary forces." "By then," says a diplomat, "the word '*mandalay*' was on everyone's lips and the battle lines were drawn."

As dusk fell, groups of vigilantes armed with sticks and bicycle chains had gathered in virtually every corner of the city. The people were told to keep the lights in their houses on in order to stave off a possible *mandalay* attack under the cover of darkness. Vehicles were stopped, people searched and questioned and *mandalay* suspects beaten up. By the 22nd,





**Mandalays tied up after being beaten by locals: uncontrolled anger; and G.P. Koirala: call for self-defence**

former home minister Jog Mehar Shrestha and Navraj Subedhi issued statements calling for peace and expressing support for the multi-party system. All in all, the pressure that the government put on the King seemed to have served to coopt the bureaucracy and take the sting out of its political opponents

In retrospect, it appears as if the Nepali Congress and the ULF were far-sighted in inviting the King to nominate two of his representatives to the Cabinet (They would have preferred it if Birendra presided over the

Kathmandu had gone berserk. Three *mandalays* were clubbed to death in the Lazimpat area and—although firm estimates are unavailable—many others probably met a similar fate. At least six policemen were beaten to death, and the corpses of two were 'paraded' through the city's streets. Although the Nepali Congress and the ULF suggest that the policemen were killed because they were mistaken for *mandalays* in uniform, there is no proof of this. It is just as possible that the unfortunate cops were victims of a people upset over the police force's reluctance to clamp down on the *mandalays*.

Soon, angry policemen 'retaliated' by spraying bullets into the crowd, killing seven innocent people, including a nine-year-old girl, and injuring approximately 70. By the time curfew was imposed, on the evening of the 23rd, the Kathmandu valley was already a bleeding mess. Police jeeps, buses and other vehicles had been burnt, houses set on fire and property damaged.

If the government was able to restore some semblance of normalcy to such an explosive situation, it was partly due to Bhattarai's clever stratagem. During an audience with King Birendra on the evening of the 23rd, the Prime Minister told the monarch flatly that it was impossible to continue in office as he was not cooperating with the government. Bhattarai threatened to quit unless the King—whose silence was interpreted as tacit

support to the *panchas* and their henchmen—came down firmly on his side. He submitted a list of people—policemen, *panchas* and bureaucrats—who were suspected of orchestrating the violence and demanded that they be sacked. Birendra was reluctant to comply but promised to ask the chiefs of the army, police and intelligence to cooperate with the new government. "I will ask them to attend your Cabinet meetings," he is said to have promised.

Apparently, this wasn't enough. On the following day, Bhattarai met the King again and this time persuaded him to go public with his support. In his royal proclamation, King Birendra appealed to the people to stand by the government and work towards strengthening the multi-party system.

Although the police took out a procession (during which they swore to avenge the killings and raised slogans such as "Death to the home minister") and stayed away from work for three days, King Birendra's intervention had had its effect. The army took to keeping the peace on the streets in earnest, the police gradually returned to duty and there were no incidents of *mandalay*-perpetrated violence. Significantly, senior *pancha* leaders such as former communications minister Kamal Thapa,

ministry himself but he declined.) For one, the King is all the more honour-bound to defend his government as he has his own men in it. (Says a communist leader: "By nominating his people, he has become a party to all that happens—if you like, a member of our side.") For another, the King's decision has alienated the *panchas*, who feel that the monarch has let them down. ("They were banking on the monarch being aloof, feigning a posture of neutrality. And they think they have been let down," says a Nepali Congressman.)

Whatever the truth, at the end of last week, Bhattarai's government was able to turn its attention to issues other than law and order. An official statement released by the Nepali Congress spelt out—though in the barest of detail—the party's line on foreign policy. Friendship with both its neighbours, China and India,

the statement said, was a priority, though geography and other considerations meant forging a closer relationship with India.

Bhattarai and the Nepali Congress' supreme leader, Ganesh Man Singh, called for the restoration of the *status quo ante* which prevailed in March 1989—that is, before the India-Nepal trade and transit treaties lapsed.

**The situation in Nepal has the makings of an unfinished revolution. And it would do India well to help finish it**



# "We are closest to India"

*Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai on his government's agenda*

**SUNDAY: What is your government's first priority?**

**Krishna Prasad Bhattarai:** The first priority has now become law and order. The second is the setting up of the Constitutional (Reforms) Commission and after that the creation of a (new) Constitution.

The problems with law and order is a passing phenomenon. And I am sure it will subside. As you know, most of the *panchayat* people have now come out in favour of the multi-party system.

**Q: So you don't see the threat from the *panchas* and their *mandalay* friends as a serious one?**

**A:** Well, of course, it is a threat. Otherwise we wouldn't have imposed curfews and they wouldn't have remained in force for so long. But the situation is not as serious as it was when the police were agitating, shouting.

**Q: When will the Constitutional Commission be set up? Has an agreement been reached about its composition?**

**A:** It will be set up soon. As for who it will comprise of, it has not been decided yet. The King says he has got to take the advice of constitutional experts and certain constitutional bodies such as the judiciary and the Raj Sabha. He has said that after seeking their advice, then we can go ahead.

But the names of the Commission's members will be announced by the King.

**Q: And its recommendations will have to be placed before the King for his consideration and acceptance.**

**A:** Of course. And I think they will be accepted. The King has said that he is no longer interested in

the direct leadership of a certain section of the people, the *panchas*.

I have also had long talks with His Majesty about the coordination committee which the Queen heads. As you know, it is a big organisation and has been coordinating the activities of different social organisations in the country. I think they have done a good job.

The King has told me that he doesn't want his wife to be involved in all this. And he has asked

stand that as far as the Nepalese King is concerned, his role is not strictly constitutional as in a western democracy where there is a monarchy.

**Q: In other words, King Birendra may play a larger role than say the Queen of Britain?**

**A:** Yes, definitely.

**Q: You are prepared to allow him to enjoy more power?**

**A:** No, more responsibility. Remember, that Nepal is something of an anthropological museum and the King is a binding force on the various ethnic groups. One example of how this responsibility may work is like this. We (the government) may request the King, if we think it is necessary, to talk to the leader of a (disgruntled) ethnic group and assure him that injustice will not be done.

**Q: Have the problems with the police been resolved? Have you won them over completely?**

**A:** No, not completely. But it (the problem) has been defused very quickly and I am satisfied with the speed at which this has happened.

**Q: Would this problem have taken much longer to tide over if you hadn't threatened to resign when you met the King?**

**A:** (Laughs) Well, everyone has a trump card or two up his sleeve.

**Q: Is it true that you demanded, during your audience with the King, that a number of people, including the police, army and intelligence chiefs, be arrested?**

**A:** No, this is all kite-flying. I only said that some officials should be fired in general.



**K.P. Bhattarai: trusts the King**

me to find a suitable alternative so that she can leave.

**Q: Are you sure that King Birendra will accept the role of a constitutional monarch, if this is taken to mean many privileges but no power?**

**A:** I think yes.

**Q: But are you 'sure yes'?**

**A:** Yes, I am sure. I am sure that the King has reached this conclusion. That is why he called me to head the government. He has known me for a long time and I am sure he knew I would not have done so unless he was willing to accept the idea of a constitutional monarchy. But we must under-



**Q: You didn't name anybody?**

**A:** No. I only said that those officials responsible for the crimes, the torture, etc. should be fired.

**Q: A few questions on India-Nepal relations. You have called for the restoration of the *status quo ante* which prevailed in March 1989, that is, before the trade and transit treaties lapsed. Have you received any response from India to this?**

**A:** The foreign office spokesman in New Delhi has said that they welcomed our statement. But, as you know, he also said that this (the questions about trade and transit) should be looked at as part of the whole problem—that is, part of all the problems pending between India and Nepal.

**Q: In other words, the only response has been a reiteration of the position that India adopted with the previous government.**

**A:** Yes

**Q: New Delhi couldn't have been too happy with your remark that the 1950 India-Nepal treaty needs to be revised. Why does it need revision?**

**A:** Well, by sheer time alone. Look, I don't want the reciprocal features—for instance, the equal treatment of each other's nationals in each other's countries—to go. After all, we are very grateful to India. Lots of Nepalese people work there—in the police, army, etc.—and the money they send home is a great source of income to our people.

So, there is no question of dismantling the treaty. And there is no question of our not being obliged to the Government of India. What I think is that we can take a look at the treaty once again.

**Q: But this is a very vague suggestion. In what respects is the treaty outdated?**

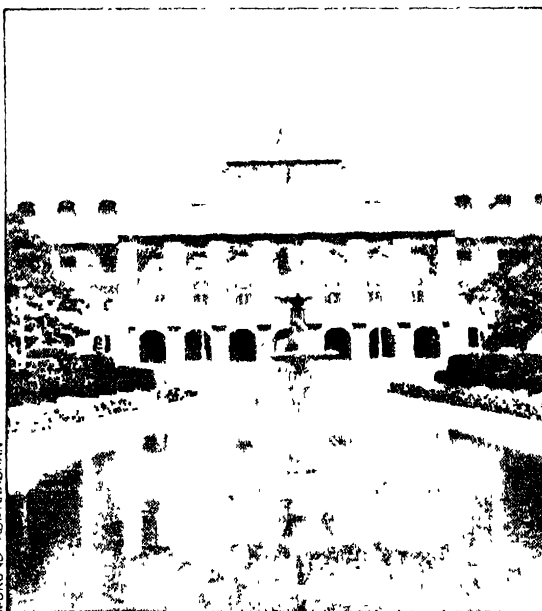
**A:** It is not completely outdated. It

needs updating, of course. To take into account the new context. After all, it was signed with the Rana government so many years ago.

**Q: But in what specific manner does it need updating?**

**A:** I haven't studied this matter thoroughly. But the present situation is hurting us very much. It is hurting India too but it is hurting us more.

We want friendship with all countries, more so with our two neighbours. With China, we have a very cordial relationship, but with India we would like to make it



**The Singha Durbar secretariat: the seat of power?**

more close. We are closer to India than any other country in the world.

**Q: Are you worried by the fact that entering into a 'comprehensive' agreement with India—that is, one which takes into consideration its security concerns—could lead to tensions between you and your ULF partners? As you know, many parties in the front are opposed to anything which accommodates India's security concerns.**

**A:** No. They are also aware of the present realities and they have been cooperating very well with us

(New Delhi refused to extend them after differences with the King on matters concerning security.)

India, while welcoming the call for the restoration of the *status quo ante*, has said that the problems over trade and transit must not be dealt with separately but rather as a part of the whole India-Nepal relationship. In effect, this is a reiteration of the position it has maintained over the last year—that differences must be sorted out by a 'comprehensive treaty'. Shorn of diplomatic finesse, what this means is that India wants to extend concessions to Nepal only in return for guarantees relating to its security.

This is a stance that puts Bhattarai and his party in something of a spot as his communist partners in government—especially the pro-China ones—are extremely allergic to any arrangement which accommodates India's security concerns. As for India, it appears sensitive to the risk in rushing ahead with an agreement. As things stand now, the King is still constitutionally supreme and can decisively intervene in Nepal's politics if he wants to. So, it is likely that New Delhi will prefer to wait until the multi-partyists are politically consolidated.

All the same, New Delhi may be constrained to concede something to the present government. The risks of appearing unaccommodating are just as great. Apart from creating the impression that India doesn't care one way or the other about the political changes in Nepal, it is likely to alienate the democratic forces. One way out of this would be for India to make gestures which do not involve reaching an agreement on trade and transit. These could take many forms: unilaterally agreeing to open up a few more transit points, providing more aid as money or projects, supplying commodities that are not covered under the trade treaty after levying a lower tariff.

While such steps may not drastically improve the lot of the ailing Nepalese economy, they will signal support for the present political order. And Bhattarai's ministry needs all the support it can get at the moment. If there was a lesson in the events last week, it is that the danger to the democratic forces hasn't completely receded. Although they occupy government, the situation in Nepal has the makings of an unfinished revolution. And it would do India well to help finish it. •

**Mukund Padmanabhan/Kathmandu**



# The drift in Assam

*The National Front has substituted unity in diversity by a coalition of disparates*



They have the Tau in charge of the north-east. Now, that would be most reassuring if they've done it because he is the Second Most Important Person in the country. But that could

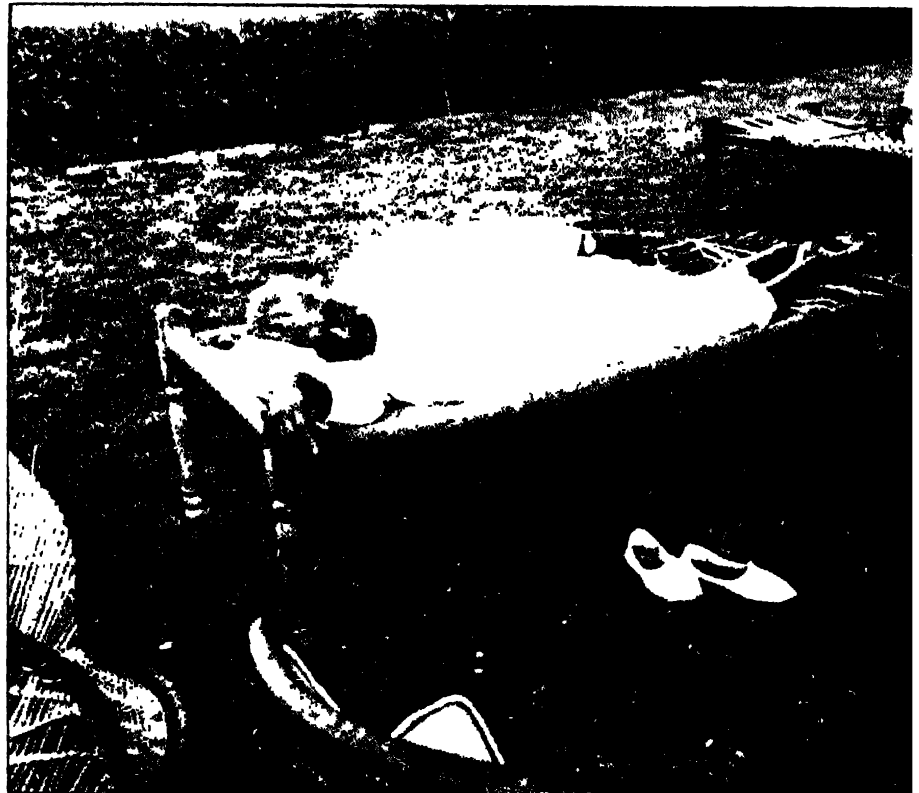
hardly be the reason as they spend all their time bad-mouthing him and praying he'll come a cropper in Meham. Part II

So, what is the logic behind asking a man who thinks all Christians should be returned to Italy to take charge of an area where three of the most fragile states of our Union are almost entirely Christian? Or asking a man who thinks foreign policy means good neighbourliness between Jats and Yadavs to take control of some of our most sensitive border areas? Or to put in charge of controlling insurgency the man most responsible for stoking it in his son's constituency?

I think we now have the answer. Our deputy prime minister, in his part-time role as agriculture minister, had received an invitation to visit Beijing. So, the shrewd V P Singh decided that if he sent his *upa pradhan mantri* on an extensive tour of the north-east, the Tau, when he arrived in China, would not be too startled to discover that the locals do not look like Haryanvis!

Or, perhaps, it is that they've been too influenced by the *Mahabharat*, where it says in the *Sabhaparvam* (26, 32) that it fell to the massive Bhima (and, for sheer ruggedness of exterior --and bluntness of interior—who but the Tau can match Bhima?) to conquer the seven Kirata Kingdoms of the north-east (i.e., Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura—what millennial prescience!)

*"Vaudehashtas in Kaunteya Indra parvatam antikat  
Kiratadhipuinn sapta vijayat tatra Pandavah"*



**Devi Lal:** What is the logic behind asking a man to control insurgency in the north-east when he is responsible for stoking it in his son's constituency?

(Then the Pandava hero, son of Kunti, went to the Vaideha lands that run along the mountains of Indra and there worsted the seven Kirata kingdoms.) So watch out, my north-eastern friends. The first Bhima came from close to Meham. The second has now gone to China to pick up a bit of Kung-fu!

The sheer insensitivity of casting the Tau as the Bruce Lee of the Brahmaputra is matched only by the games they've been playing with the post of Governor in an area where a Governor's role is infinitely more important than putting certified communalists into the Patna Raj Bhavan.

**O**f all the contemporary leaders of the north-east, none is more universally respected, nor acknowledged as a greater pioneering nationalist,

than the veteran Capt Williamson Sangma. He was named as Governor of Mizoram when he gracefully retired after a distinguished political career spanning all the decades from the birth of East Pakistan (which made the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, now Meghalaya—of which he was a leading light—the first bastion of our defences) to the last Assembly elections in Meghalaya. The NF government turfed out Williamson Sangma and brought in his place a Haryanvi lawyer (a kind of advance guard of Bhima the Second) whose main claim to fame is that he was the defence counsel of Laldenga, then leader of the Mizo insurgency, now leader of the Opposition and Father Confessor to Simranjeet Singh Mann. Nothing could have been more craftily designed to signal Lalthanhawla, the Congress chief



minister of the state, that his days are numbered, notwithstanding Lalthanhawla's enormous patriotic sacrifice in having voluntarily stepped down from the chief ministership of the state in 1986 to facilitate the accommodation of the erstwhile insurgents in the democratic process in terms of the Laldenga-Pradhan Accord

Which brings us, of course, to Pradhan himself. R D Pradhan was one of the most outstanding home secretaries the IAS has produced. He paved the way for the negotiations with Sant Longowal and then stepped aside when Arjun Singh was appointed Governor of Punjab, so as to concentrate on Assam. More than any other single individual (Rajiv Gandhi excepted) it was Pradhan who brought to an end the agitation in Assam, which (like the troubles in Punjab) had started—and it is *this* that is significant when the last Janata government was in office. (What horrors does the present one have in store for us? Give them a chance, buddy—they've had only 150 days to make a mess of every problem they inherited from the past. The poor chaps need a few days more to notch up a few brand new crises of their own—and God knows they're trying their best to

match the Morarji-Charan Singh record!) Pradhan followed up the Assam Accord with the Mizo Accord and then guided Mizoram and Arunachal to full statehood. There could have been no better choice for the Raj Bhavan in Itanagar (that's in Arunachal, Tauji, not a village somewhere off the Rohtak-Karnal Road). Nor could there have been a greater expert on Assam for the successor government to consult. Well, precisely because he was adored in Arunachal, an authority on Assam and an expert on the MacMahon Line, the NF government has kicked him out, and replaced him with—nothing. Yes, nothing! For, in what must be the choicest display of insensitivity that any central government has ever shown to tribal pride and national defence preparedness, they've put Arunachal under the

"additional charge" of the totally *ana-di* new Governor of Nagaland.

And why at all do we need to have a new Governor in Nagaland? Only because the last one, Dr Gopal Singh—appointed by the wicked, wicked Rajiv government—is an outstanding scholar of comparative religions, who has written a brilliant book on Jesus Christ. A special qualification, one would have thought, to be Governor of a largely Christian state. But all that the Tau (or is it the Shahi Imam? Or is it Lal Krishna Advani? Or is it whoever it is that makes up what the Prime Minister takes to be his mind on these matters?) sees in the presence in the Kohima Raj Bhavan of a Sikh expert on Christianity is proof positive of the Italian hand!

**T**his, then, ladies and gentlemen, is the government to whose tender mercies we have bequeathed the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, which together constitute the great and noble state of Assam. If you have a map handy, would you please reach out for it? For you will see that there is no way anyone can get to any of the other six states of the north-east without going through one or both of these two valleys. In other words, neither can we defend ourselves against the Chinese nor check arms-trafficking across the Burma border nor counter infiltration from Bangladesh without access to these frontiers through the state of Assam. If Assam spins out of control, one-eighth of our country goes up the spout. And if foreign hostiles of any kind reach the plains of the Brahmaputra valley, not all the Bhimas of Meham will avail us an iota of security, peace or independence.

And this central government, in all its grossness, ignorance and insensitivity, has as its fire hose for fighting the fires in Assam, a state government run by the National Front's north-eastern regional component—the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). For five years, the foolishnesses and excesses of the AGP were held in check by the Congress government at the Centre because the Congress party was not in hock to the AGP. Now, the NF government can

only acquiesce in these foolishnesses because the Assam component of the NF government is nothing but the self-same perpetrators of these foolishnesses. When the Congress was in power in Delhi, it could mediate between the caste Assamese Hindu majority—which the AGP aspires to represent—and the numerous minorities—Bodos, Karbis, Ahom tribals, Koch Rajbanshis, Bengalis, Muslims, Marwaris—who make up the palimpsest we call Assam. Now, at least as far as Assam affairs go, it is the AGP itself which is in power in Delhi (as home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed revealingly discloses when he pathetically protests that his writ does not run in Assam!).

And, so, when V P Singh sets up yet another committee (his favourite



**R.D. Pradhan:** Since he was adored in Arunachal, and an authority on Assam, and an expert on the MacMahon Line, the NF government has kicked him out

use to side-step formulating policies on issues) to sort out the problems in Assam, what we really have is the AGP mediating between itself and all the disenchanted minorities of Assam—who, in the first place, are disenchanted only because of what the AGP has done to them. Making the hangman the judge, thus, becomes the distilled essence of the NF's prescriptions for Assam. It means pouring oil through the fire-hose to inflame the fires in the valley.

The root cause of the crises in Assam is the narrow chauvinism of the AGP. It does not stand for Assam as a whole or for all the people of Assam. It stands only for one section of the Assamese people—a majority, yes,



but, then, a majority is not everybody. Its treatment of those who are not with it—ethnically or politically—has been so shortsighted and discriminatory that it is now hoist with its own petard.

For the AGP's outlook—and methods—are now being emulated by the non-Ahom minorities (and even the non-Mahanta/Phukan Ahoms) of Assam. If "Assam is for the Assamese," says Upendra Brahma, then Bodoland is for the Bodos. If "Assam is for the Assamese," says Rongpi, then Karbi Anglong is for the Karbis. If "Assam is for the Assamese," say the Bengalis of the Barak Valley, then Cachar is surely for the Cacharis. And the Indian Muslims of Assam ask whether there is no home for them in Assam, which they take to be part of India. As do

not going to violate my oath of secrecy by unmasking its contents since I am no Arun Shourie and, therefore, no hero of the entirely appropriately named AASU! There is, though, no truth to the rumour that the Rajasthani business community of Assam has started singing the old Mukesh song.

*AASU! bhari ham yeh jwan ki rahen, koi unse keh deh hamen bhool jayen!*

We will never have a solution for Assam so long as those responsible for the problem have the key say in determining the response to the insurrections in the state. The Assam Accord gave the AGP the opportunity of showing that the preservation of the Assamese identity did not mean extinguishing the identity of the others who live in the state. Instead of being encouraged to preserve the Assamese

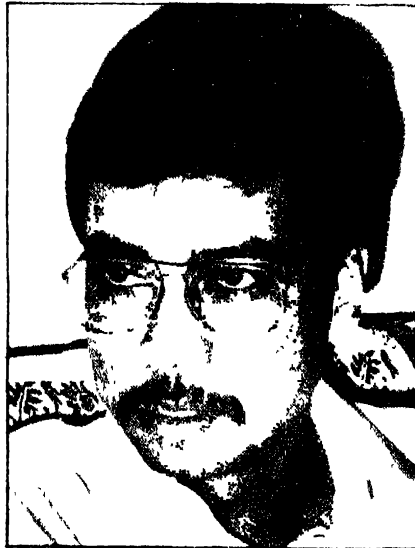
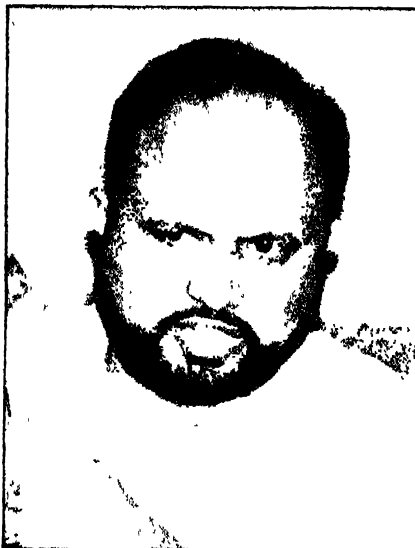
"coalition of disparates" It has no over-arching concept of India and so has become the spokesperson of a congeries of jockeying subnationalisms. It is the antithesis of that synthesis which has made our millennial civilisation unique in combining antiquity and continuity with heterogeneity.

**S**uch a National Front, and its coalescing components, can only lead the country down the road of disintegrative subnationalisms. What the AGP is up to in Assam, the other regional components of the NF will shortly be up to elsewhere. V P Singh knows this—for not so long ago he was a Congressman—but can do precious little about it because while, then, he had behind him a century-old party dedicated to the proposition, *Vividha-ta mein ekta*, all he now has behind him is a squabbling bunch of old men and tired ex-revolutionaries tending their progressively narrower little nests while the tree on which they are perched starts slowly disintegrating from within.

Given what he thinks of V P Singh, the only one to be pleased with this creeping chaos is the Tau. And for the delectation of our revered Tau, there is from *Angrezi* history, a comforting tale which I must recount, especially now that the Tau has been designated the government's resident genius on the Christian and other curious states of the north-east.

Many, many years ago there lived in England a King, by name Henry VIII, who was fed up with an Italian who called himself the Pope because he objected to Henry marrying many wives (like the NF marrying Ajit Singh and the BJP and the CPI-M and anything else at all that keeps its political nuptials going). So Henry VIII decided to break from the Roman Church and declared England to be a Protestant *Rashtra*. And one of his many wives was Anne Boleyn, whom everyone called Anne of the Thousand Days because, after a thousand days, Henry VIII chopped off her head. And now that we are on the verge of cutting our Italian links and proclaiming *Bharatvarsha* as a Hindu *Rashtra*, V P Singh is in danger of being known to history as Vishwanath of the (—) days. Fill in the blank, dear readers, cut out the page—then post your answers to the Tau! Pity poor Weepy. And, Cry the Beloved Country! •

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.



**Prafulla Mahanta (left) and Bhriгу Phukan:** What do they make of the secret memos being circulated in the state declaring that the ULFA is a muscle arm of the AGP?

the Marwaris, before they are pumped full of bullets by the thugs of the ULFA—the United Liberation Front of Asom—the muscle arm of the AGP.

And before all of you start screaming that I am a dirty Congress agent for linking ULFA to the AGP, I beg you to ask chief minister Mahanta or home minister Phukan—but not both at the same time, please, for they are not talking to each other—what they make of secret Memo Nos. SB XI (A) SPC/67/89, Vol III/III, dated 4.11.1989 from S P. Sou, Assam, Guwahati to S P. Kokrajhar, circulated by Dy. S P. DSB, Kokrajhar under cover of his U.O. No. DSB V/10/35158-208 dated 1.12.89. (A copy has come into my hands but I am

culture by integrating it into the composite culture of India, the forces which eventually coalesced into the National Front pandered to the lowest common denominator of regional chauvinism around the country. The National Front has, in the name of "genuine federalism", cobbled together all the narrow-minded regionalisms of the country—beginning with the caste and linguistic chauvinism of the Janata Dal itself. Where our Freedom Movement created the ethos of an Indian identity which transcends (and subsumes without extinguishing) the many different ethnic-linguistic-religious identities that make up our composite culture, the National Front has substituted "unity in diversity" by



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# Matters of the heart

*Ill-health forces Mother Teresa to relinquish charge of the Missionaries of Charity*

**T**he legend is leaving. On the grounds of failing health, Mother Teresa has announced her resignation from the post of superior-general of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity. Starting out on her own in 1948, she put together the order which now has 3,000 committed workers who have accepted an alternative way of life. It is estimated that the order's 400-odd establishments help some 1,20,000 people worldwide. For four decades, Mother Teresa's homes have been the only sanctuary for those whom she calls "the poorest of the poor, those who need it the most." That reality will not change. But the face presiding over the organisation will.

The transition won't be problem-free. The Mother has been the epicentre of her organisation. To live up to the standard set by her would be a daunting task for her successor. And since the order supports such a wide network of social organisations, the choice of the next superior-general is crucial for the institution. The constitution of the organisation specifies that the superior-general must be at least 40 years old, must have completed ten years of active service after her final vows and should be chosen by the electoral college by secret ballot.

Since the first election in 1961, the Mother has held this post. The constitutional rule, restricting the tenure of an office-bearer to two consecutive terms was waived by the Vatican for the Mother. But now the founder is stepping down. Her follower will, undoubtedly, be less glamorous. But even if

she does not wield the same power worldwide, or not get the Nobel Peace Prize, she must be worthy of her post, and deserve to be the Mother's successor.

There are many candidates for the post. Of them, Sister Agnes is the people's favourite, and closest to the Mother. When they met, they were still plain. Subhasini Das and Sister Teresa, a nine-year-old and her geography teacher at Loreto School, Calcutta. The teacher was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, an Albanian from Yugoslavia. Blessed with a beautiful voice, young Agnes was a soloist in the choir. At 18, she joined a group of Loreto nuns and at 27, took her final vows. Agnes Bojaxhiu became Sister Teresa.

On the way to Darjeeling for her 'retreat' Sister Teresa received the call: "I want you to serve me among the very poor." That was 10 September, 1946. By 1948, she had got permission from the Vatican and had quit Loreto for the slums of central Calcutta. Subhasini followed her, the first seed of an order destined to number in the thousands. That was 40 years ago and Subhasini was just 19. She took the Mother's name, Agnes, and worked along with her taking care of the old and the sick, teaching little children in the slum of Moti Jheel. They lived, then, at 14 Creek Lane, in the house of Michael Gomes, the first to offer help.

Mother Teresa calls Sister Agnes her 'second self'. Unlike her, however, Sister Agnes is publicity-shy, to the extent of refusing to confirm that she was, indeed, the first disciple. And the Mother is not willing to comment on her chances in the coming election.

"Her greatest asset is her unquestioning devotion to the Mother," says a volunteer. But that is also her biggest drawback—in her loyalty, she is too dependant on the Mother, and though she takes over whenever the founder is away, she is somewhat hesitant about her decisions. Nonetheless, Sister Agnes was elected first councillor in 1985, with the highest number of votes. The quiet, self-effacing nun is, as assistant-general, second to the Mother in the hierarchy.

**T**he congregation is extremely tight-lipped about the possible successor. The election will be held around 8 September, before that it is quite

**Mother Teresa: mum's the word**



ASHOK CHAKRABORTY



impossible to say, they insist. "God will tell us who," says Sister Priscilla, the Anglo-Indian secretary-general, who is herself high up on the list of possible successors. "It is not for us to decide. It is not a political affair. The call will come".

The Mother, too, refers you to God when questioned about her successor "God will decide," she explains gently, raising her eyes heavenward "We are mere instruments in his hands".

This constant referring one to God is characteristic: the order is avowedly Catholic, going back to the Vatican for clearance on every technicality. Father Edward Le Joly remembers the day the Mother had encouraged him to write about the order as a Catholic organisation "We are not teachers or nurses or social workers, we are religious," she told him. "I do not see the poor first, I see Jesus who suffers as the poor." And this very Catholicism earned her the only criticism that she has received. Rumours went around that she converted the ailing in Nirmal Hriday, the home for the old and dying, and the children in Shishu Bhavan, to the Catholic faith "She converts no one," counters Le Joly. "She preaches the love of God and tells the ailing to make an act of surrender to God." In keeping with her Catholic beliefs, the Mother has taken a firm stand against both abortion and birth control. The unborn are Jesus too.

The sainthood that has been conferred on the Mother over the years has its impact on the functioning of the order. "She can do what others can't dream of doing," says Le Joly. "She picks up the phone and calls Reagan to request funds for Ethiopia. She gets it. She catches Gorbachev in Washington and asks permission to open centres in the Soviet Union. She has five homes there now and plans to open more. Not bad as far as Catholic institutions in Communist countries go!" And yes, she was the first to open a Home for AIDS victims in New York, when they were severely ostracised. When the New York Governor was asked why he had allowed it, he had said, "When the only living saint asks you for something, how can you refuse?"

This will be a thing of the past once the Mother retires. "It might not be a disadvantage," says Le Joly, "Mother Teresa made the institution, the next one has been made in the spirit of the institution. It is excellent that she will

be taking over under the guiding spirit of the Mother. It would be a gentle transition."

But will she have the charisma of the Mother? "She won't need it. She is not the foundress. She will have her own charisma." Less conspicuous, less glamorised, the nuns will continue their work with their usual faith and dedication.

**T**here might be a problem, however. Mother Teresa has not decentralised authority. All powers rest in the hands of the superior-general in Calcutta. She has no provinces and thus no provincials to share responsibility in the various parts of the world. Right now she commands respect worldwide, but will her successor gain universal acceptance within the order?



Of those in the running, Sister Shanti and Sister Andrea are doctors with an MBBS from the Calcutta Medical College. Extremely capable, they are in charge of the medical aspect and of training the younger nuns. Sister Andrea, a Polish-German and the only foreigner among the Council members, started a branch in the US. Another strong contender is Sister Dorothy, a Bengali from Calcutta, who has worked in Australia and Latin America and was supervisor of the homes in the Far East. Sister Camillus, the youngest member of the council and a Mangalorean from Bombay, has managed the

finances of the order for over 23 years and is also a likely candidate.

The intensely spiritual Sister Agnes does not compare well with them as an administrator. But, as the Mother says, "It is not how much we are doing, but how much love, honesty and faith we put into doing it." And as a "pencil" in His hand, the next head of the Society should not face too much trouble. "None of us has what the world looks for. This is the miracle of the little Sisters around the world," the Mother had said a few years ago. "As long as we have our conviction, the work will prosper."

Any advice for her successor? The Mother's eyes brimmed with kindness as she switched on that infectious smile. "To live as we have lived," she said. "That is all. God will

**T**he Mother's advice for her successor: "To live as we have lived. God will take care of the rest."

take care of the rest."

But what exactly does retirement mean for the Mother? The head of the formal religious order can step down--the empire of love and caring that she has built can have a new person on the throne. But can the guiding star retire?

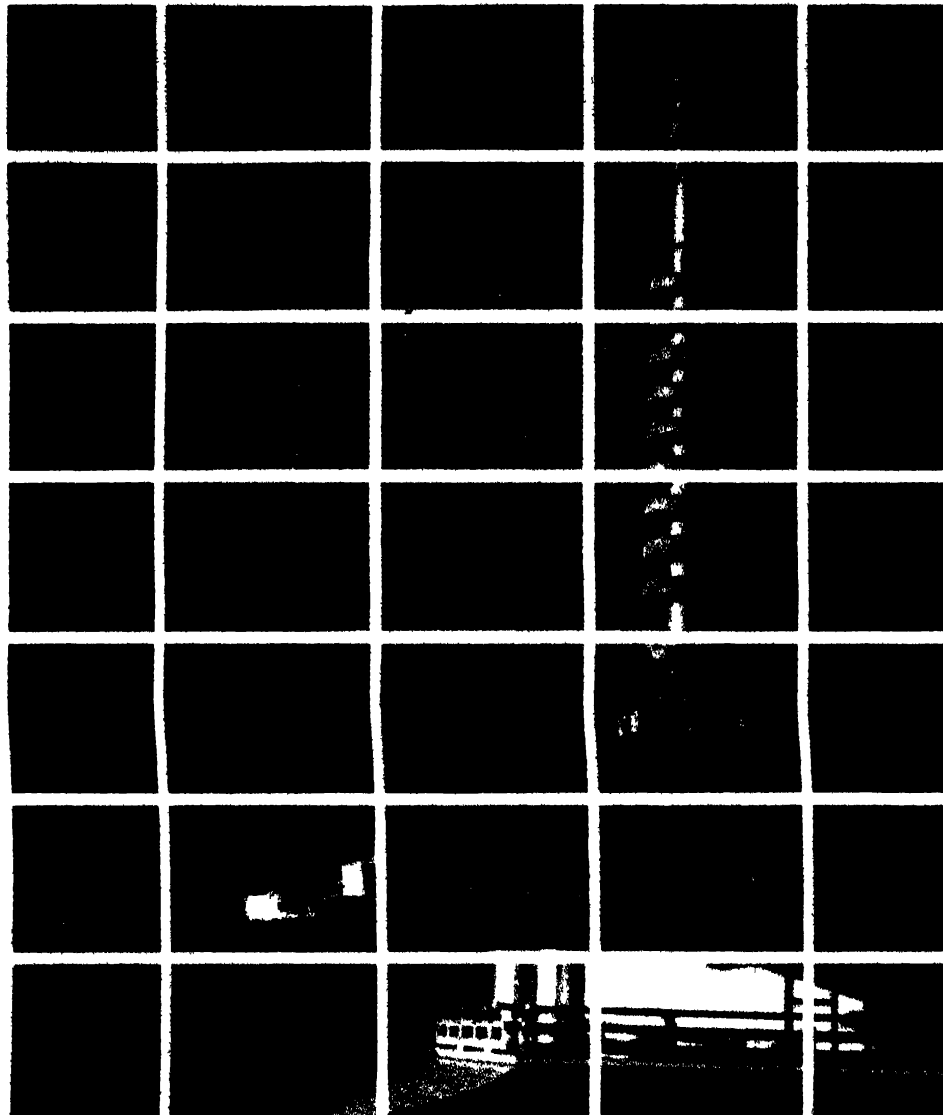
Quite clearly, the Mother cannot be replaced. By "stepping down" the Mother is merely handing over the reigns of the organisation to a younger nun. "She will, of course, continue to be our Mother," says Sister Priscilla.

And, with mundane responsibilities gone, the legend can only grow. ●

**Antara Dev Sen/Calcutta**



**The Rising Sun.  
Across the Indian Horizon.**

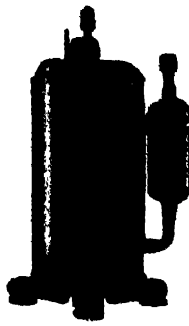


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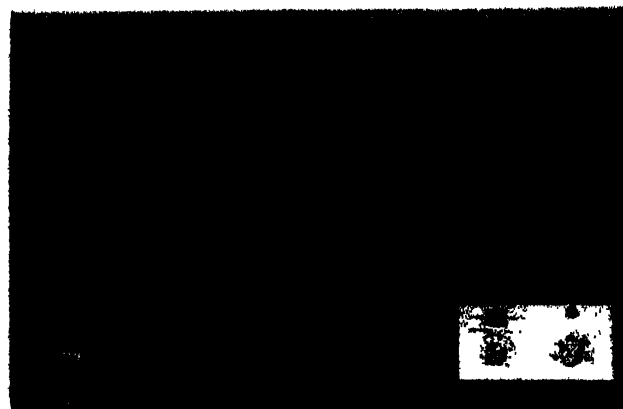
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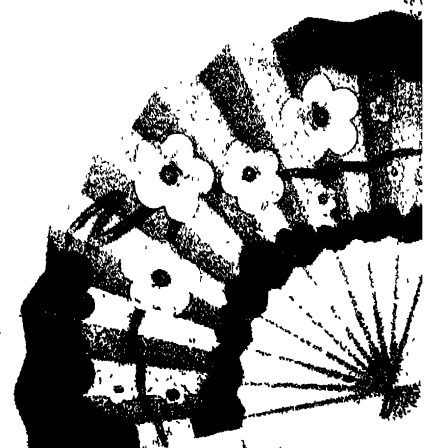
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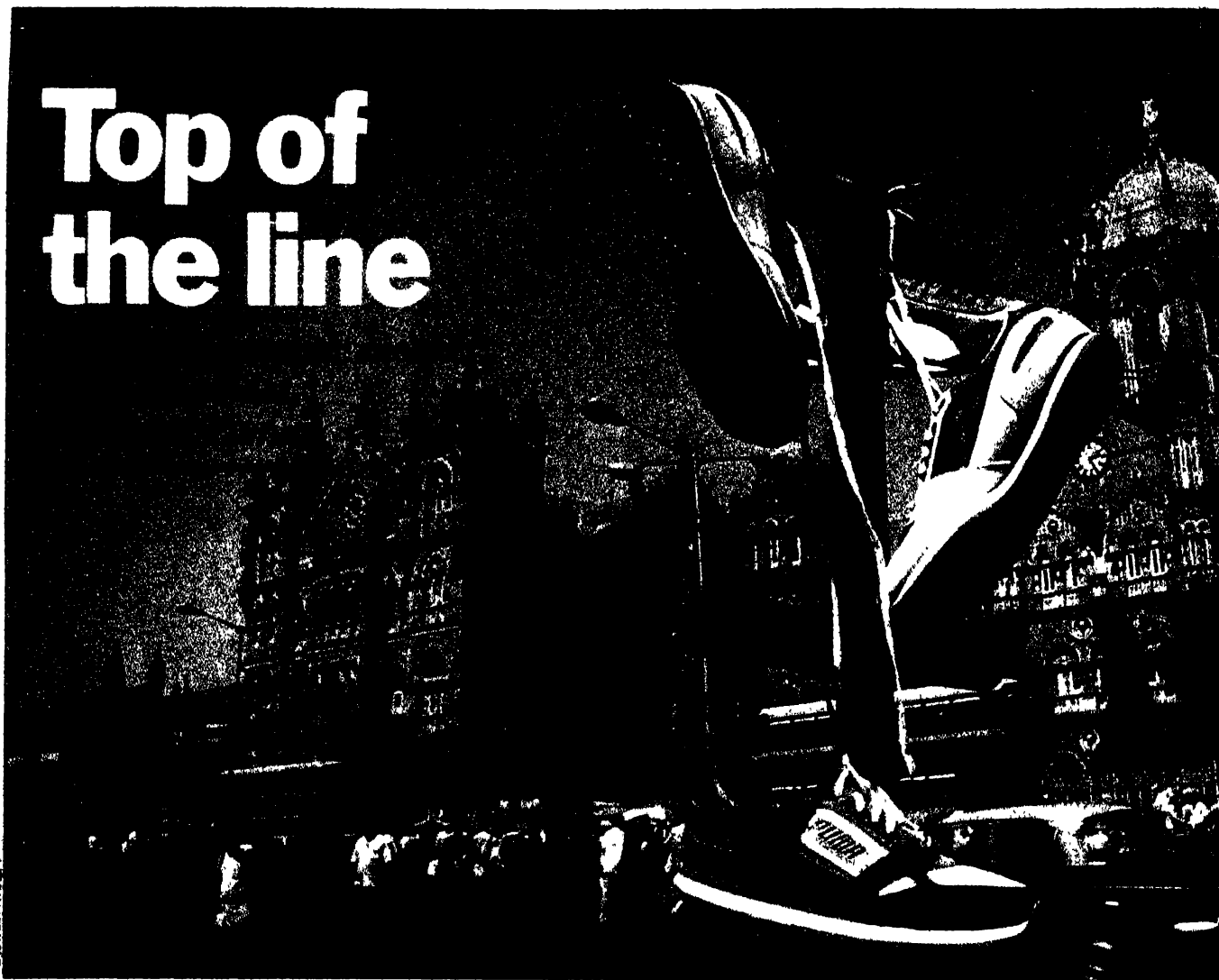


# Exceptional. Sensational. So National.



# Top of the line

GAUTAM PATOLE



**C**artier Bazaar, Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Bombay Here, ethnic chic is a dirty word. T-shirts, denim jeans and jackets from across the seas, and sneakers—Reebok, Nike, adidas, Puma and Lotto—keep shopshelves full. All of it is smuggled, and is usually spurious. The real thing costs the earth. a pair of Reebok sports shoes, that ultimate yuppie accolade, costs anything between Rs 1,000 and Rs 2,600. Nike, the all-American sports shoe brand, fetches Rs 1,500 a pair. And for the fake variety, imports from Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, Rs 400 plus. Business has boomed more each year, with India's middle-classes, on a reckless expenditure binge, continuing to pick up anything that spells convenience and more importantly, style. Mostly, from smuggled-goods shops.

There is a change now. The friendly neighbourhood smuggler is suddenly

facing competition. Not from his colleagues in the trade, but from multi-crore business houses. Bata India, Consolidated Footwear and the house of Khataus, which manufactures the Carona brand of shoes, have entered the sports shoe market, offering more than the smugglers ever did. the genuine article, at relatively moderate prices and with assurances of quality. Bata has tied up with adidas Sport-schuhfabriken of West Germany, Consolidated with Lotto S.P.A. of Italy, and the Khataus with West German company Rudolf Dassler Sport, the makers of the Puma brand of sportswear. Their target audience—urbanites in the 18-25 years old slot—is the same as the smugglers', in Cartier Bazaar and in similar haunts all across the country. And this market is vast.

Says Hilla Motiani, product manager with Consolidated in Bombay: "According to a study done by a mar-

## **Puma sneakers displayed near Bombay's Victoria Terminus**

ket research agency, the total value of pocket money available to 19-year-olds is around Rs 500 crores. And the purchasing power of youngsters in the 18-25 age group works out to something like Rs 2,000 or Rs 2,500 crores. With the rise in consumerism, the increasing purchasing power of the Indian middle-class and its easy susceptibility to Western influences, it only made sense that we should go in for a technical collaboration with Lotto." Says Hiten Khatau, the maker of the Puma-Carona range: "The middle-class in India constitutes nearly 150 to 200 million people. If we can even get five per cent of this market share, we've got it made." Adds Motiani: "Why redesign the wheel when it is already there?"

Why indeed? Lotto was the first to hit the market, in March



1989. Puma and adidas followed through this year. All three ventures are technical collaborations, with no equity participation by the principals. The three brands are priced in a range from Rs 250 to about Rs 650 a pair, selling in most of the top-rung cities. While Lotto and Puma makers are quiet on the count, Bata plans to manufacture 3,50,000 pairs of adidas brand shoes this year, and will export one-third the amount (Carona has an export commitment of 25 per cent). Says Ranajit Biswas, a ninth standard student at Calcutta's St Xavier's School, and a resident of the city's upper-middle-class New Alipore locality: "It is good that now we can buy decent designer shoes in India and be sure that it is not a fake. It may be expensive, but paying for something good doesn't hurt. The money does not matter." Sweet music for the manufacturers, and for another reason, too. The market could reach well below the 18 years minimum limit surveys show.

Bata already has its successful Power sportswear range, but this, say company executives, should not be a problem for the acceptability of the adidas range. Says N. Bhaskar, a marketing manager with Bata, and in charge of the adidas division: "While Power is a sports shoe all right, adidas is a highly specialised, performance-oriented sports shoe, and instead of cutting into each other's sales, Power and adidas will complement each other." They already do—both brands are available in larger Bata stores. The advantage Bata has over its rivals is its vast chain of exclusive retail outlets—numbering 1,300—all over the country. Consolidated and the Khataus have to rely on basically convincing a general retailer to stock up, at boutiques, department stores and sports goods shops.

**P**erhaps that is why there is a bizarre twist to the shoe shuffle. Lotto shoes also find pride of place at numerous Bata outlets. Something Bhaskar calls a "working rela-

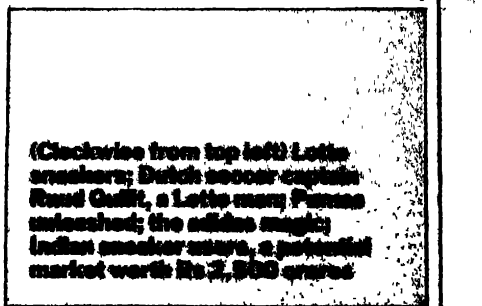
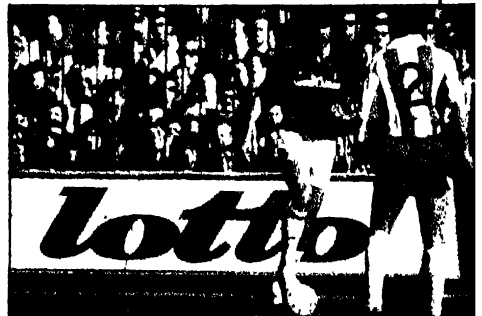
tionship". Says he: "If there is a demand for a product, it only makes good sense to sell it. Why turn away a customer?" Adds Consolidated's Motiani: "Bata prefers to have the entire range of competitive products and therefore Lotto models are also displayed along with their brands. After all, they are not just into shoes, but into the business of retailing."

Both discount the possibility of one brand cutting out the other. Says a top Bata executive in Calcutta, who declines to be identified: "Our policy is to give our clients an open choice. They, if they want to buy Lotto, will go in for Lotto. And if they went to buy adidas, they will buy adidas. The choice is theirs. So why should they go to some other shop? They may as well buy it from our shop." Lotto benefits from a ready retail chain, courtesy Bata. And Bata, in turn, picks up a fee for stocking Lotto shoes. Company executives decline to publicise the financial arrangement of the deal. Khatau, the Puma man, is philosophical about his competition teaming up. "The more players in the

game the faster the market will grow," he says. Concurs Motiani: "With competition, all of us will be on our toes and everyone will try to upgrade their products."

However, this will not mean supplying everything the foreign collaborator manufactures for the international market. Puma, for instance, sells 200 models worldwide. "We can't offer the entire range," says Khatau, "especially the top bracket, which sells for as much as US \$ 170 (a pair) in the US. But we are offering the best value for money and our products will be on par with Puma sold worldwide." Ditto for the others. Bata, in fact, delayed its adidas launch by four months in March this year because the shoes did not match international specifications. There are two German executives in the company's Bangalore unit, supervising production.

Quality is crucial. Says Malik Tejani of Metro Shoes, a major countrywide shoe manufacturer and retailer, which stocks the Puma-Carona range: "Brand names are meaningless in India. Unless a customer is assured of



(Clockwise from top left) Lotto sneakers; Dutch soccer captain Ruud Geert, a Lotto man; Puma sneakers; the adidas logo; Indian sneaker store, a potential market worth Rs 2,500 crores



the same international standards, he is unlikely to go in for these hybrid brands." Tejani is also among a few toeing a line Indian socialists would love. Companies are going in for these "so-called foreign collaborations," he says, "where there is no transfer of technical know-how but only an outward flow of foreign exchange. The big giants of the footwear industry are indulging in a self-destructive game." It is the fear of being wiped out that is motivating others to strike collaborations with foreign companies, he says. Expectedly, the adidas, Lotto and Puma purveyors poo-hoo the suggestion. With reason: it sounds like a major domestic shoe manufacturer letting off steam because he has not

managed a collaboration, and they have.

But with the way things have been going, Tejani and his ilk may not have to grouch for long. Three international brands are already in, and other players surely have their eyes on the Indian performances. If sales hit the jackpot, the country could well see other top international brand names such as Nike trooping in. And how could one forget Reebok? Possessing a pair of shoes with this magic brand-name completes an "in" person's ensemble. Perhaps Tejani could show the way. •

**Adite Chatterjee/Bombay with Lavina Dixit/Calcutta**

## WORKER MANAGEMENT

# Blue collars to pin-stripes

*Some labour unions turn to managing companies*

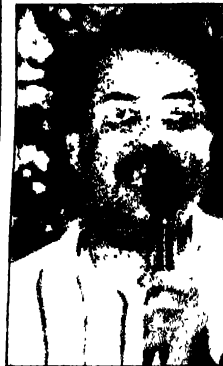
**T**here is a new wave in Maharashtra. Instead of killing off industry, some labour unions—though few in number—are planning to turn around companies, saving them from a sickness that affects corporate bottomlines as well as the labourers' existence. And the freshness of the approach is that labour is attempting to rectify the management's faults, which could make a company go into the red as easily as a militant, obstructive union. It is a welcome move: Maharashtra has the second highest number (10,000) of sick units in the country, behind West Bengal.

Says Kiron Mehta, president of the

Philips Employees' Union in Bombay: "What worries us is the fact that big units are getting sick due to mismanagement. One can't worry about bread and butter demands if the source of bread and butter itself dries up. So, our immediate task is to prevent Philips from getting sick, and checking mismanagement at the highest levels." The sense of urgency is not unfounded. Philips closed the books in March 1989 with a loss of Rs 13.49 crores for a 15 month period, compared to a profit after tax of Rs 3.46 crores in the year-ending March 1987. Company managing director J. Bergvelt hopes that when they tote up the

books this year, Philips should see a no profit-no loss situation.

But what Bergvelt calls a "temporary setback," his workers call "sick". And one way to keep a check on the management, say company workers, is to monitor what the bosses do, and let financial institutions know about it, so that they, in turn, can pressure the management to stay in line. Some losses, they say, are unwarranted. An example is the company giving up 20 prime apartments to its senior executives when they retired, which cost Philips close to Rs five crores in lost assets. Another is the company's habit of shifting employees around its seven countrywide establishments—one employee was moved as many as 50 times in his career—which unnecessarily



**Kiron Mehta,**  
president, Philips  
Employees'  
Union



**Arvind Mafatlal,**  
chairman Mafatlal  
Engineering  
Industries

**Mafatlal is battling a sick company. Mehta feels that units are becoming sick because of mismanagement at the highest levels**

adds to costs. A hundred workers are idle at the company's warehouses at Bhiwandi, Vikhroli and Bhandup in Bombay, as materials management and transport have been given out on contract to an outside party. The result: more expenses, and uncontrolled inventory.

The first step for the workers, appears to be to stall the company's plans to sell off its assets to curtail losses; the point they make is that if mismanagement stopped, Philips would right itself anyway. Union leaders have not yet worked out a concrete plan to tackle the executives, but a bid to take over the management is not out of the question. The kind of thing Philips employees are doing today, says D. Thankappan, worker-director of Kamani Tubes Ltd (a company workers took over in end-1988), "could not have been possible 20 years

**Philips Employees' Union members on a protest march: pressuring the management to stay in line**





ago. Those were the times that unions thought there were certain areas that were the prerogative of the management and that the promoters owned the companies."

This attitude has changed, says Thankappan, since the industrialists and businessmen now depend on financial institutions, with the result that "mismanaging units and jettisoning social commitments have become a style with the owners". This, he says, has in turn put pressure on the unions, "who have realised that they have a greater stake in reviving sick industries and preventing sickness". Till 1989, says Thankappan, employers used to rush to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) to get bailed out, with an eye on the subsidy they received. But now, it has levelled off as there is a very real "fear that they may lose the unit" to workers who may work it better than their ex-bosses. As happened with Kamani, through BIFR intervention.

While Kamani is being run successfully, and Philips workers are desperately trying to save their company from becoming sick, over 3,000 workers of Mafatlal Engineering Industries (MEI) are keeping their fingers crossed as the Industrial Credit and Investment Corp. of India (ICICI) examines their Rs 7.4 crore scheme for reviving the company. (The Mafatlal group unit has been under lockout since May last year.)

After chairman Arvind Mafatlal declared the company "sick", the ICICI was appointed to oversee its revival. The agency, in consultation with Mafatlal management, came up with a Rs 15 crore plan, excluding a provision for additional working capital. MEI workers went one up. They submitted a plan—helped along by the Centre for Workers Solidarity Against Job Losses and Closure, a Bombay-based organisation—half the size of the ICICI-sponsored one, which included provisions for working capital, perhaps suggesting they knew better than the management how to turn the unit around. They also complained to the BIFR that neither the management nor the financial institution were keen on reviving the company, rather, Mafatlal was more interested in shutting down completely and then selling off over 10 lakh square metres of company land.

Says Kamani's Thankappan, who is also the Centre's secretary, "We are

hopeful of making a success of Mafatlal Engineering. We are giving all to get our scheme for Mafatlal accepted. If this happens, it will shake up the private sector, as this is a major company. It will also put considerable pressure on banks and financial institutions to change their attitude in respect of monitoring and finalising financial packages with private owners. It is their attitude (of being unconcerned) which has resulted in sickness being so rampant." Mafatlal borrowed funds from ICICI and the Industrial Finance Corp. of India, among others, for modernisation in 1984-85, but still incurred losses of Rs 54 crores. What the workers have going for them is BIFR support. The agency's chairman, R. Gangapathi, has appealed to

institutions to support workers cooperatives which propose takeovers.

And these proposals are increasing everyday. Workers cooperatives are queuing up to take over companies all over the country—Vandelseide National Conductors Ltd, a Voltas Ltd subsidiary in Pune, Deepak Insulated Cables in Bangalore, A.P. Carbides in Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, A.P.V. Engineering in Calcutta, Power Metals and Alloys, Thane and Bombay's Raghuvanshi Mills. Workers in India have obviously realised that they have an equal stake in keeping a company in good shape. This is the best thing that could happen to any organisation in our problem-ridden industry. •

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**

## PLANNING

# Vague remedies

*Planners get flak from ministers and bureaucrats for their approach to the Eighth Plan*

**P**Prime Minister V. P. Singh appears to have failed in his experiment of replacing crony economics with crony intellectualism. Major differences have surfaced between members of the Planning Commission (PC), and Cabinet ministers and bureaucrats in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). All over how the government should go about the Rs 6,50,000 crore Eighth Five Year Plan.

From the beginning, the objectives of the newly-constituted PC, which took over last December, was not to do anything which would remotely show continuity with the previous regime's policies. High profile members from the Rajiv administration, all economists—Abid Hussain, Hiten Bhaya, Raja Chelliah, among others—were replaced by Gandhian social activists such as L. K. Jain and Ela Bhatt. This is a new breed of "philanthropic planners", in a tearing hurry to usher in radical economic change from the PC's committee rooms.

The first project the members grappled with was the draft approach paper for the Eighth Plan. Two drafts had already been prepared by the last government, but this bunch of members junked it. Scrapping the idea of pushing through with fast-paced economic development, as the previous drafts had suggested, the new PC focussed instead on Panchayati Raj institutions, the role of women in rural



**Ramakrishna Hegde**

**The Planning Commission chief and his colleagues could well be out of synch with the Indian economy**



development, the ill-planned right-to-work concept, developing rural and backward areas, and wrote a treatise on the political nature of planning for the state's development.

This approach paper was ready in February, but was not circulated to all PC advisors till April. Instead, it went to Cabinet ministers, so that PC deputy-chairman Ramakrishna Hegde could gauge the mood of the political heavyweights. Then came the fireworks. The strongest opposition to the PC's work came from deputy PM and agriculture minister Devi Lal, who was particularly unhappy with the PC's recommendation for transferring centrally-sponsored schemes to state governments. (Perhaps it was to avoid a confrontation with the Lal that a full PC meeting chaired by the Raja, was held in New Delhi a day before Lal returned from his trip to Australia in mid-February.)

Industry minister Arit Singh is sour about the low priority the PC has accorded to developing new technology and industrial modernisation. The Commerce minister Arun Nehru's wrath for the low emphasis given to exports. Energy and civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad is livid that the approach paper mentions the word "energy" just once in its 62 pages. Understandably as the PC's direction is contrary to policies mentioned in the Union budget and the new three-year import-export policy. Khan and

labour and welfare minister Ram Vilas Paswan even shot off their protests to Hegde. Asks one outraged PC member: "Are we supposed to be a post-office or a think-tank?"

A think-tank would be anybody's answer. And by numerous estimates, one that has not been doing much thinking. Where the PC really came unstuck was with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate figures, projected at six per cent a year in the Seventh Plan period. The original draft paper sent to the PM talked about the "alleged growth rate of five

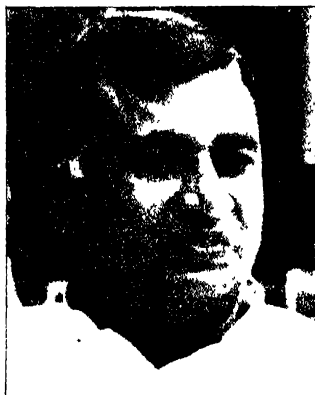
per cent by the earlier government" (which was later changed to "the economy is said to have grown by five per cent"). The Raja and finance minister Madhu Dandavate took strong objection to this assertion. The PC members conceded a three per cent growth in the previous plan period for employment, as against two per cent recorded by the Rajiv-led PC's approach paper, but stood its ground on the GDP rate ultimately,



Deputy prime minister  
Devi Lal



Commerce minister  
Arun Nehru



Energy and aviation minister  
Arif Mohammad Khan



Industry minister  
Arit Singh

**All four ministers have found fault with the Eighth Plan approach paper, suggesting that the planners do not know the priorities of a growing economy**

they concluded a 5.3 growth. This brought the PC at loggerheads with bureaucrats at the PMO. At a high-level meeting chaired by the PM, attended by senior Cabinet ministers and Hegde, the discussion of GDP was muted. But later, the PM's economic advisor Montek Singh Ahluwalia wrote a strongly worded note on the subject to Hegde, disavowing it as minutes of the meeting. This was viewed by PC members Jain and J D Sethi as bureaucratic high-handedness, and they even threatened to resign.

The new-look PC is viewed with some amount of disdain. Generally, the new approach paper reflects some of the promises made in the Janata Dal's election manifesto, but the problem is that it is very low on specifics. Says a senior PC advisor, who declines to be identified: "It (the draft approach paper) is like a long litany of woes. It has a lot of rhetoric and gives the impression that India is decadent, is facing an economic crisis and is splitting apart."

Media criticism was stronger. A *Times of India* editorial reads: "The fact that planning has a nuts and bolts aspect was ignored by Mr Hegde's team when it drew up the approach paper. *sans* statistics, *sans* targets, *sans* considerations of resource constraints and thus *sans* practicability." The board recommendations in the paper vaguely touched on the need to curb the role of the public sector, have fewer controls on private industry and widening the scope of foreign investments and high technology. Alongside these airy statements was an over-emphasis on village level institutions and small-scale industry.

Says Hussain, a former PC member: "While the quantum of growth is necessary, the Planning Commission cannot be indifferent to the content of growth. I think the present Planning Commission is wary of letting us know what they have in mind." He adds: "Maybe they have a two-phased approach. They have shown us their

economic philosophy and will later reveal to us the nitty-gritty of their policies. We can only wait and see."

The nitty-gritty, as Hussain puts it, can only lead to more trouble at the PC. And not just with approach papers. Already, the Cabinet and the PMO have shot down Hegde's proposal to appoint three chief ministers as PC members. In the budget, Dandavate hardly mentioned the PC's plans, especially about the right-to-work. Four projects opposed by the PC have received government clearance, the Rs 3,000 crore Haldia Petroche-



micals project, the Maruti 1000 c.c. car, the Tehri dam and the Pepsi cola project.

Moreover, the government is relying more and more on the advice of the Economic Advisory Committee (EAC) chaired by Sukhamoy Chakravarty. Curiously enough, when the new PC was constituted, members spoke of Chakravarty as the godfather of planning, and treated his white paper on the current economic situation as their Bible. The equation has altered significantly. The government gave wide publicity to Chakravarty's second paper on export strategies, the document received a hostile response from the PC. And significantly, the EAC, and not the PC, is working on the government's projections for the small-scale sector and agriculture-based industry, areas which the Commission considers its very own.

The noise over Ahluwalia's protest has died down. But there could be problems of a similar kind in the future. The PC may be hankering for a

role in India's development, but it may discover that realities are hopelessly out of synch with its aspirations. And that it is out of synch with the powers-that-be, too. On 30 April, after a three-day session at the PC, the final draft of the Eighth Plan approach paper was sent to the Union Cabinet, with some "editing", as Commission sources put it. The National Development Council is yet to take a look at it. When it will, more "editing" is sure to follow. The Planning Commission may complain about heavy-handedness from the top, but surely, it cannot deny the fact that people at the top have a far better idea about what to do with the country than a bunch of intellectuals who understand handlooms, not growth rates. Whose sphere of activity has been restricted to writing letters of protest and running voluntary organisations, not grappling with electricity generation and exports. And pushing decentralisation with disastrous results. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi with Sudeep Chakravarti**

## STOCK MARKET REGULATION

# Secure market, secure investors

*That is what the Securities and Exchange Board of India wants and a proposed legislation in Parliament may soon make it a reality*

**T**here is a sense of suspense and expectation about the Securities and Exchange (Regulation) Bill before Parliament, which is expected to be passed before the end of the current session. And it has strong backers, both Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh and finance minister Madhu Dandavate, who feel that such a bill will bring much-needed order to India's lawless stock markets. And provide the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) with legislative teeth to combat this lawlessness. Says S.A. Dave, SEBI (and Unit Trust of India) chairman: "It will function basically in the interest of investor protection and the development of the capital market." This should be a welcome change for SEBI. Since its inception in 1987, the organisation has been

generally restricted to churning out analyses on the performance of the stock market.

The securities market in the country has been regulated for decades, but the approach has been a segmented one, with several legislations—the Companies Act, The Capital Issue (Control) Act, the Securities Contracts (Regulations) Act, and numerous attendant rules and notifications—combining, and often, confusing the issue. The system has become inadequate with the substantial growth in the capital markets. Resources

raised by non-governmental public limited companies jumped from Rs 164 crores in 1980 to Rs 6,000 crores in 1989. This is almost equal to the term loans disbursed by financial institutions to the corporate sector. This year, the figure could be as high as Rs 10,000 crores, and by the end of the Eighth Plan period, the market is projected to mop up more than Rs 50,000 crores.

There is a steady growth in the investor population, and entering the share bazaar is fast becoming acceptable to a large section of the population. (It is estimated that seven per cent of household savings have moved into the capital markets. In Japan, it is 12 per cent.) And with this growth came the ills that an uncontrolled system breeds, whether out of ignorance or greed. Investor awareness has increased, but has not kept pace with the quicker adaptability of corporations and stock brokers to the share game. Consequently, they have been able to hoodwink the system—for example, insider trading is rampant through legal loopholes at the cost of the investor. A SEBI study quantified these ills: poor standards of disclosures, misleading advertisements by companies on their shares' performance, company results and promises of a windfall from proposed projects, just before share or debenture issues to lure investors. Creation of a false market through price manipulations—a company buying up its own shares to increase prices before an issue, or still better, getting an obliging financial institution to help out, charging a high premium on dud share issues with this method. The list goes on.

"All these (factors) had the under-



**S.A. Dave**

**If the Securities Bill comes through, the SEBI chairman would be the final judge of all activities related to the stock market**



pinings of a vulnerable and unstable market," says the SEBI study. "While growth is a parameter of the health of the market, it is not the only ingredient. Equally important is the manner in which it is brought out. Too rapid a growth in too short a time can (make the stock markets) lose the sense of direction, and has the potential of serious setbacks." Presumably, problems such as the fly-by-nighters who charged the share boom in 1985-86, only to have the bottom fall out of the market the next year. Two years after the boom, in 1988, 65 per cent of the share issues which hit the market in 1985-86 were being quoted below

acted. Also, business hours at various stock exchanges vary, as do settlement periods. These realities "compound the market's imperfections and give rise to speculation and arbitrage opportunities," says a SEBI official. It helps scheming brokers to cheat their clients, who never really know the price at which their stock was actually sold. A computerised market, says Mahendra Kampani, chief of Jamnadas Morarjee and Co., will ensure that "all transactions will be captured on the stock exchange floor and then there would be no scope for manipulation."

The disclosure system is guided by

merchant banks, who often support issues because they want their commission from a company, and forget the investor. There is also a criterion for the selection of brokers. SEBI officials are also represented on the board of the Bombay Stock Exchange, and are also screening applications for new exchanges at Baroda, Rajkot and Bhubaneswar.

For its part, SEBI has evolved a set of legislations for all aspects of the securities market, for once—when the Bill is passed—under one wing. The new framework will aim at better investor safeguards, through stricter disclosure requirements, accounting

standards, arbitration in case of a dispute, steps against insider trading and similar market malpractices. "SEBI has to have teeth," says a senior agency official, though not necessarily in a confrontationalist way.

Though the Securities Bill has been discussed for years, vested interests, mainly in the brokerage community, have been able to stall any moves towards improved legislation. The Bill and SEBI faced competition from other government agencies too. Primarily, the Controller of Capital Issues (CCI) and the Company Law Board were reluctant to give up their enormous powers of discretion and arbitration, the time taken to clear new issues depends entirely on the CCI, with favoured industrialists often getting a go-ahead (as happened with



## Both Prime Minister V.P. Singh and the finance minister Madhu Dandavate feel that the Securities Bill will bring much-needed order to India's lawless stock markets

par, and the rest were not being traded at all.

However, stock market observers say that this phenomenon was not restricted to these two years but had repeated itself almost every year since 1981. This trend also increased with the growth in the number of stock exchanges, from just eight in 1980 to 16 in 1989, and the number of listed companies from 2,265 to over 6,500 presently. Only 21 of the 3,401 scrips that are traded on all stock exchanges are traded everyday.

Presently, stock exchanges do not have an automated system of recording business on the trading floor (slips of paper) since as deals are trans-

acted, the Companies Act and the Securities Contract (Regulation) Act. The document for such disclosures is the issue prospectus. The precise nature and content of the disclosures is left to the discretion of the company—major risk associated with a project, where and how is the money from a share issue to be utilised, background, and performance of the company, technology employed in a project, competence of its technical collaborators, are either glossed over or not mentioned at all by the company.

SEBI has generated a high level of debate, and some steps have already been taken in the direction of enforcing regulatory mechanisms. For example, now there is a code of conduct for

Dhruvhai Ambani and Abhey Oswal) in days when others had to wait months. The government—especially the V.P. Singh administration, has increasingly been of the opinion that if capital markets and investor confidence are to grow, then an organisation like SEBI, and the Securities Bill, will have to come into play.

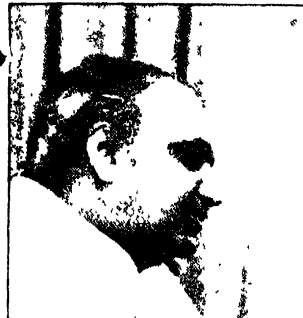
About time, as many in the financial community feel. "I don't know why the (Securities) Bill was not thought of earlier," says Udayan Bose, chairman of Creditcapital, a major Bombay-based financial consultancy firm. He adds, "I hope SEBI will be able to perform its role with complete autonomy, away from political pressures." ●

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**



## ■ Family ties

**K**eshub Mahindra woke up one morning to read screaming headlines that said the house of Malhotras own a 13 per cent stake in Mahindra & Mahindra, the flagship company of the Mahindra group. And that Satish Malhotra was tipped to succeed Keshub as chairman of the group, and his son Ranjit, Keshub's son-in-law, would be coopted on the board—a coup. The Mahindras, however, say that the claims are all bunkum. The Malhotras



**Keshub Mahindra: shaky?**

have only 4.2 per cent of the equity after the conversion of bonds and debentures, and Mahindra Ugin (MUSCO) will have 6.9 per cent (the financial institutions hold 40 per cent). The Malhotras are said to have stopped picking up Mahindra shares after the panic they caused. But they still hold an ace—3.5 per cent NRI holding, through American company Nevistar Inc., which they have purchased. If the Malhotras pull through with this, the Mahindra seat could be shaky. Unless Keshub retaliates with a counter-move to secure his position.

## ■ Prime time

**U**S \$10 billion worth of investment in the Indian stock markets?

## STOCK QUOTE

### “Thank God for Pramila Dandavate.”

*A New Delhi economist, after Union finance minister Madhu Dandavate's wife led a protest march against inflation to the minister's residence.*

With that kind of greenback support, our humble stock indices could give Nikkei and Dow Jones a run for their upward mobility. Executives from Batterymarch Financial Management, a Boston, US-based portfolio management firm, made the incredible assertion in Madras last week, saying the company—on behalf of its clients—would invest the massive sum in Indian stocks this year. How? Through the Commonwealth Investment Fund. Where? In Indian blue chips and hi-tech companies. Why? The investment climate in India is just great. The Batterymarch chairman Dean Lebaron had in tow

investment managers from General Motors and AT & T, apparently scouting around for places to put money in. (Both companies are Batterymarch clients.) Though Lebaron's utterances had a touch of finality, nothing will really be certain till New Delhi gives the go-ahead. The speculation in Indian stock circles is on expected lines: is the government finally giving in to foreign investment in the markets, traditionally banned? If it is, then it's the most radical investment policy in decades. And if that is true, further leniency in foreign equity participation for Indian ventures could not be far behind. Farewell, FERA?

## ■ Sugar n' spice

**A**s far as the government is concerned, one adds to the other. Exporting sugar, only to import sugar. Letting middlemen take in a few crores on deals. Creating a system of balance with levy—therefore subsidised—sugar for its stocks, and letting the rest clean up in the free market. Holding back on supplies, then releasing lakhs of tonnes before the festival season, as if doing the populace a favour. Always, a fine-tuning of sugar economics and political expediency, no matter which administration rules at the Centre. Now, Prime



**Nathuram Mirdha: sugar attack**

Minister V. P. Singh, finance minister Madhu Dandavate and food and civil supplies minister Nathu Ram Mirdha are hell-bent on tackling inflation by beating back on sugar. No more hoarding of free-sale sugar, they say, and anyone found hoarding back stocks now to make a killing later will immediately find his sugar turned to levy. Move to battle prices round one. The baddies are the operators, and never the government. Convenient. Considering the fact that government policies lead to trouble most of the time.

## BUSINESSMAN OF THE WEEK

### Abhey Oswal

*Chairman, Oswal group of companies*



• He's back in the news for doing what he does best: luring investors. Under-the-weather fertiliser king Abhey Oswal is recommending a 50 per cent dividend for Bindal Agro—plus a 1.2 bonus for shareholders. A jump in net profit to Rs 12.98 crores from Rs 7.53 crores, and the bonus have ensured that the Oswal share is pegged at a steady Rs 68. Abhey Oswal was down after the Raja took over, but soon bounced back—in one of the first compromises of the new administration—and was let off the hook for his mega-issues and even allowed to go through with his mammoth fertiliser project in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, which most corporate observers predicted would be stymied. He lay low, out of circulation and media attention for the last three months. His comeback signals a resurfacing of sorts, but this time round, he may not be as aggressive in promising wonders and publicising his high-level contacts.



# Revamping the party

*Rajiv Gandhi begins to reorganise the Congress*

**D**efeat, it was assumed, would mature Rajiv Gandhi. It has, in the sense that the Congress president has taken all the setbacks with a certain amount of calm and fortitude. But those who thought that the former Prime Minister would change his style of functioning were sadly mistaken. The coterie around Rajiv Gandhi—which according to many Congressmen was the cause behind the downfall—continues to call the shots while the party veterans merely look on from the sidelines.

Thus, soon after Rajiv Gandhi be-

his decision, insiders aver that the senior leader was upset with the way Rajiv Gandhi was running the party.

However, the interesting aspect is that most of the senior leaders hold nothing against Rajiv Gandhi personally. In fact, both Kamalapati Tripathi and Uma Shankar Dixit have praised the Congress president in their private conversations with partymen. What they object to is the manner in which the coterie around Rajiv is still influencing the Congress president. On more than one occasion, Tripathi had complained that these so-called advi-

apparent from yet another development. The Congress Forum for Action formed by a group of party dissidents is heading for a split. The issue of contention: whether or not to take a hostile posture in relation to the party president. A number of senior Forum members including former AICC general secretary Jitendra Prasad and Mohammad Amin Ansari have threatened to quit if others decided to oppose Rajiv Gandhi. In fact, Prasad and Ansari had made it clear to Forum leaders like Vikhe Patil, Naval Kishore Sharma and K.R. Ganesh

that the body should work to strengthen the hands of the former Prime Minister. However, a section of the Forum decided to release the letter written by Kamalapati Tripathi to Rajiv Gandhi criticising the Congress leadership to the press with the intention of getting political mileage out of it. Later, Forum president Vikhe Patil wrote to Rajiv Gandhi clarifying the misunderstanding that the issue created. "It is a mischief done by a few leaders," said Patil, who is an MP from Maharashtra. And Congress president Rajiv Gandhi seems to have been placated.

With most sections of the Congress on his side, Rajiv Gandhi has begun the difficult task of reorganising the



**Kamalapati Tripathi and Rajiv Gandhi: making up?**

gan revamping the party set-up, the old guard within the Congress once again came into conflict with the younger generation. Not very long ago, Kamalapati Tripathi made a public statement criticising the Congress president for being guided by the same people who let him down. Now, another senior leader, Uma Shankar Dixit, has resigned from the Congress Working Committee (CWC). Dixit sent in his papers at least two weeks ago but the Congress president is yet to accept the resignation. Though the octogenarian Uma Shankar Dixit has cited poor health as the reason behind

sors hang like "Rahu and Ketu" around Rajiv Gandhi.

Rajiv Gandhi is fully aware that if he is to rejuvenate a disillusioned party, he must carry with him all sections of the Congress. Recently, Rajiv entrusted two of his trouble-shooters—M.L. Fotedar and R.K. Dhawan—with the task of persuading Uma Shankar Dixit to withdraw his resignation from the CWC. The Congress president has also discussed the issue with Sheila Dixit.

That the Congress continues to stand solidly behind Rajiv Gandhi is

party at all levels. So far, the changes have only been cosmetic with no major surprises. Out of the four general secretaries appointed so far, three are non-controversial figures: H.K.L. Bhagat, C.K. Jaffar Sharief and Mahavir Prasad. The only one who has caused some resentment is former Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar because of his involvement in the fodder scandal. The real mood in the Congress camp will be known only when Rajiv Gandhi makes the important changes. And that according to party insiders is not far off. •

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**



# Dear Prime Minister

*An angry Ashoke Sen shoots off a letter to V.P. Singh, protesting against his exclusion from the Union ministry*



DELHI

Even before the dust kicked up by the controversial letter written by deputy prime minister Devi Lal on the alleged misdeeds of the *Indian Express* proprietor, Ramnath Goenka, could settle,

V.P. Singh is saddled with another explosive letter. This time it has come from former Union law minister Ashoke Sen, who, besides being a legal luminary, also happens to be president of the West Bengal Janata Dal. And there is a distinct possibility that the episode may snowball into a major controversy, telling upon the so far smooth relationship between the National Front government at the Centre and the Marxists.

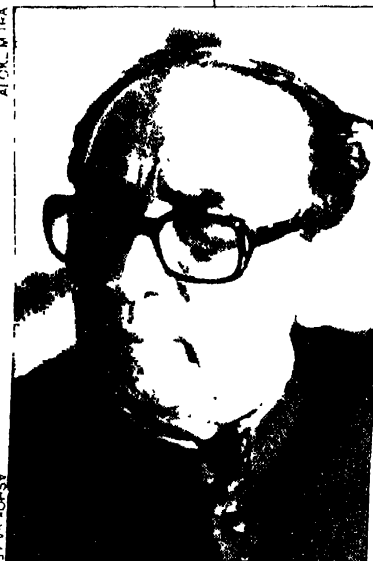
What provoked Sen to write a six-page letter to Singh is the latter's repeated reminder of his supposedly principled stand of not inducting into his council of ministers those who had been rejected by the people in the last Lok Sabha elections as that would mean bringing them "through the backdoor". This was a clear hint that Ashoke Sen, who lost from Calcutta (North-West) in the November 1989 elections, would be kept out of the Cabinet. To rub salt to his wound Singh, while talking to newsmen at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 25 April, added that by following this principle, he would be losing talents of people like Ashoke Sen, Rajmohan Gandhi, S. Jaipal Reddy and others. Feeling humiliated, Sen shot off a six-page letter to the Prime Minister and immediately left for Calcutta.

Even though in the last paragraph of the letter Sen said that he had no intention of releasing it to the press on

"fuller consideration", he dropped enough hints that this should not be taken to mean that he would not defend himself publicly. The letter was scooped by the Bengali daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika's* Special Correspondent in Delhi, Shyamal Kumar Chakraborty, and was front-paged in the next day's edition.

According to sources, Sen has sent a copy of the letter to West Bengal Chief minister Jyoti Basu with a covering letter in which he stated that V.P. Singh had not only insulted him, but Basu and the people of West Bengal too. The reason for bringing in Basu is

**Singh(left) and Sen: soured relations**



**Sen sent a copy of the letter of Jyoti Basu with a note saying that V.P. Singh had not only insulted him, but Basu also**

not far to seek. Basu had agreed to leave one seat for the Janata Dal's Ashoke Sen in the Rajya Sabha elections on an explicit assurance from V.P. Singh that Sen would be inducted into his Cabinet. Basu was keen on Sen's inclusion into the Union Cabinet because West Bengal goes unrepresented at the Centre. This was the only reason why the Marxists agreed to sacrifice one seat in favour of the Janata Dal. But true to his style Singh has gone back on his word. V.P. Singh's so-called "principled stand" has not washed with Sen. He has pointed out in his letter that no policy decision was taken by the Janata Dal against inducting members of

the Rajya Sabha into the Union ministry. In fact, the argument of Singh is not being taken seriously by everyone within the Dal. There have been instances when the Prime Minister had laid down certain principles and violated them later. For example, before he effected the latest Cabinet expansion, he had said that only those with sufficient experience would be taken in, ignoring the fact that Maneka Gandhi, who had no previous ministerial experience, was already functioning as a Union minister of

state.

Referring to Rajmohan Gandhi's controversial defeat in Amethi, Ashoke Sen has told Singh in his letter: "If your logic is correct that Rajmohan Gandhi has been rejected by the people because he was defeated in the election when he had the courage to stand against Rajiv Gandhi when no one else had the courage to do so, and others were anxious to change their constituencies for safer places, then it would be travesty of judgement."



Coming to his own case, Sen lists five factors that contributed to his defeat in the November Lok Sabha election.

- "BJP fielded a candidate against me contrary to an all-India understanding that they would not contest against an MP who had resigned from the Lok Sabha with others. They took away more than 40,000 votes, apart from affecting seriously the impact of a solid campaign."
- "Janata Dal Parliamentary Board chairman called a press conference and publicly announced that they would not support my election. He set up a candidate, who took away nearly 5,000 votes. This candidate had publicly said that he was set up by Samar Guha and Dilip Chakravarty, whose supporters openly campaigned against me. They have not been punished yet."
- "We did not get any help in money or materials whereas the Congress candi-

Despite these outpourings, Sen displays a measure of naivety. He should have sensed that he was out of favour with V. P. Singh. The last sentence of his letter is revealing. Writes Sen: "I hope you will favour me with a reply and this letter will not receive the same treatment as many of my earlier letters have." Against this background, one wonders how Sen hoped to become a minister when his letters were not even acknowledged by the Prime Minister.

Janata Dal leaders are maintaining a studied silence over this episode. Asked for his comments, S. Jaipal Reddy, a spokesman of the Dal and its presidential candidate, said: "Mr. Ashoke Sen is a senior leader of the party and it would not be proper for me to comment on his letter. And in any case, I am busy with the presidential election."

However, sources in the Janata Dal attribute Sen's downfall to his closeness to the Arun Nehru group. Of late, Arun Nehru's relations with V. P. Singh and deputy prime minister Devi Lal have not been particularly warm. Also, the erstwhile Lok Dal faction, as well as those belonging to the Janata Party, have been feeling that the members of the erstwhile Jan Morcha had got a much bigger share of the cake than they deserved. On the morning of 21 April, Devi Lal met V. P. Singh and warned him against inducting the likes of Ashoke Sen and

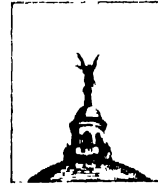
V. C. Shukla into his Cabinet. He forced Singh to prepone the swearing-in and hold it on 21 April instead of 22 April as the Prime Minister had earlier planned.

What effect this incident will have on the relationship between V. P. Singh and Jyoti Basu is not yet clear. However, Basu, in his characteristic outspoken manner, has made it clear that he is not happy with the manner in which Sen has been kept out. After all, the government of V. P. Singh is propped up largely by the support lent to it by the Marxist MPs from West Bengal, and ironically, the state goes totally unrepresented in the Union ministry. •

**Kuldeep Kumar/New Delhi**

## Fissures in the Front

*But the Congress(I) is in a worse shape before the civic polls*



WEST BENGAL

The Calcutta Municipal Corporation for long has a reputation for being 'the den of corruption'. On the eve of the municipal elections, Kamal Basu, the outspoken and often irreverent mayor of the corporation, controlled by the Left Front since 1984, admitted that the corporation's reputation was well-deserved. Such an admission, before the close and crucial elections of 17 June, would normally have been an unpardonable *lata pas*, bordering on political *hara-ki*. But the cost of such flip honesty is not very high. The Left Front, which currently holds a hairbreadth edge (71/68) over the Congress(I) in the municipal council, faces a weakened political foe. Internal feuding and inconsistent leadership has sapped the Congress(I)'s morale, and retaining the 68 seats it won in 1984 may prove difficult for the party. While Congress(I) municipal party leader Shiv Kumar Khanna is still ailing, the party chief whip, Swarna, Kamal Saha takes a curiously optimistic stand. "We will get 97 seats provided the Left Front does not rig the elections," he says with customary bravado. But Saha declines to add that if the Left Front does resort to booth-capturing, the Congress(I) will lack the muscle-power to fight back. His Congress(I) colleagues are less confident. "We should get about 60 seats. This is a fairly respectable figure," admits councillor Hridaynand Gupta.

Former union finance minister Pranab Mukherjee was at the bridge when the Congress(I) ship was scuttled in the 1984 municipal elections. The Left Front had managed to eke out a narrow victory after the state government added a few rural areas where the Left Front led the Congress(I) by overwhelming margins into the CMC's jurisdiction. But there are fears that the margin between victory

**Jyoti Basu has made it known that he is unhappy with the manner in which Ashoke Sen was kept out of the ministry**



Jyoti Basu: unhappy

date, with the support of big magnates, spent nearly Rs 50 lakhs.

- "Though we contested only one seat, no leader went from the Centre."
- "I should have changed my constituency like others."

An angry Sen further asks, "Is my election by the state Assembly of Bengal to the Rajya Sabha by the largest number of votes without any significance? Is my entry by the back door? Is the Rajya Sabha election useless?" Sen, who first became the Union law minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet, has also reminded V. P. Singh that it was he who had organised his meetings in West Bengal and had introduced him to the Left Front leaders after Singh parted company with Rajiv Gandhi.



and defeat may be embarrassingly wide this time. Since the furore over Rawdon Square when the citizens and Congressmen forced the government to stop turning over a sylvan city park to an unscrupulous builder, the Opposition has been reduced to burning papers in the municipal legislative chamber and equating mayor Kamal Basu, a millionaire Marxist and an old friend of chief minister Jyoti Basu, with Mohammed Bin Tughlaq, a quixotic sultan of Delhi.

Making a minor comeback is the same Pranab Mukherjee, PCC president, A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury will stay above the fray as Mukherjee, and another former Union minister, Ajit Panja will select

and a solitary Congress-S nominee). The CPI(M) will contest 89 of the 141 seats, the same as in 1984. "We are the little fish and the big fish is gobbling us up," a Left Front leader told SUNDAY. "We were given 10 seats last time, four or five fewer than we wanted. Now we got only nine," said an RSP leader. The CPI has been given 15 seats, two less than the last time, and the Forward Bloc's quota of 16 has been slashed to 12. But such internal bickerings may not affect the Left Front's performance. For the BJP, the forthcoming election could be the acid test and if it does make any inroads, it could be at the Congress(I)'s expense in the business district in Buriabazar.

That political campaigning can take unexpected turns is evident from the Congress(I)'s and Left Front's election strategies. Both parties will take aim at the Centre's decision to raise the price of fuel and railway tickets. "The Left Front believes that it wasn't really necessary to raise prices. The budget deficit has remained in any case. But what can the National Front do? The Congress(I) left the country deeply in debt," said the CPI(M) state secretary, Sailen Dasgupta. Dasgupta brushed aside suggestions that such campaigning would backfire as the National Front candidates were the Left Front's allies.

"There is nothing wrong with that, it necessary we can agitate against our own government," he added.

While welcoming Dasgupta's broadsides against the *bandha sarkar* (the friendly government in Delhi), Congress(I) leader Manas Bhuiya remarked that there was "a limit to shielding an inept government". The price rise would be a major issue in the coming elections, he concluded.

The millions of voters can hardly be excused for remaining indifferent. With the two major parties making the same promises and criticising the same people, the Calcutta corporation will remain one of the most inefficient organisations in the state no matter which party comes to power. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**

## Building bridges

*The Orissa Congress(I) president is yet to consolidate his position*



ORISSA

Will the first tribal president of the Orissa Pradesh Congress(I) committee (OPCC-I), Girdhar Gomango, succeed in pulling the Orissa Congress(I) out of the morass it has slipped into following its disastrous performances in the last parliamentary



**Girdhar Gomango: a shaky start**

and Assembly elections? Gomango is hopeful, but political observers are not quite confident, given the acute factionalism in the state party. The 48-year-old member of the Lok Sabha and former Union minister who took over as the state party chief from Nandim Satpathy in the third week of April is confident of pulling off the rescue act. "I am acceptable to all Congressmen and I shall take all of them with me to strengthen the party. I have the patience to hear the problems of my partymen and I shall try to solve them, and if I cannot do so myself, I shall share the burden with my colleagues", said the new OPCC(I) chief.

A lot, however, depends on the report that the unassuming and soft-



**The Calcutta Corporation building: battle ahead**

candidates. Other party heavyweights including Siddhartha Ray, Abdus Sattar, Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, Somen Mitra and Subrata Mukherjee will formulate the electoral strategy. Unity among the party's warring chieftains is of primary importance and even last minute team work could well lead to an upset win.

If the Congress(I) remains a conglomeration of disunited leaders, the sound of unseemly squabbles is emanating from the leftists' camp. The CPI(M)'s junior partners RSP, Forward Bloc and CPI—seem united against "Big brother". This time, all three parties have been allotted fewer seats than in 1984 in order to accommodate the five National Front candidates (four from the Janata Dal



spoken Gomango builds up with such powerful and scheming party leaders as J B Patnaik, Nandini Satpathy and the Congress(I) Legislature Party (CLP-I) leader, Basant Kumar Biswal. Out of the three, Gomango will have a hard time building bridges with Satpathy, who is angry over her removal from the post of the OPCC(I) chief, a post she held for four months since December last year.

The Satpathy camp has already launched a campaign against the OPCC(I) chief with allegations that Gomango is weak. Moreover, he is also being subjected to pressure from various groups of the party. According to Satpathy's supporters, these factions, led by J B Patnaik, Basant Biswal, K C Lenka and the former chief minister Hemananda Biswal are trying to influence Gomango.

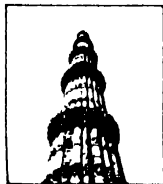
In fact, Gomango, the first OPCC(I) president after independence from the backward Koraput district, has to depend on these leaders in the "difficult task" of revamping the party in the state. Though Gomango is known for his honest image and quiet efficiency, he has little knowledge of the intra-party equations in the politically important coastal belt of the state. He has yet to prove that he has a personality to inspire the partymen in particular and the people in general, at the state level. Further, he has to sort out his relations with Basant Biswal, who is not only the CLP(I) leader but also an aspirant for chief ministership in future in case the Congress(I) manages to stage a comeback. As for Satpathy, Gomango would not find it difficult to sideline her since she is opposed by all other group leaders.

The test of Gomango's leadership will be towards the end of May when, as per his first statement as the OPCC(I) president, he will reorganise the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee. The "united" party that Gomango hopes to build will depend on how he reconciles the conflicting interest of the different factions. Moreover, Gomango will have to show his qualities of leadership during the elections to the municipal and panchayat bodies. Even if the Janata Dal government decides to postpone these elections by a few months, they are most likely to be held before the end of this year. Meanwhile Gomango has planned to undertake a state-wide tour in May in his bid to revitalise the Congress(I) which is undoubtedly in a shambles. •

**Sarada P. Nanda/Bhubaneswar**

## Waiting for take-off

*The Airbus A320 may be re-inducted in phases*

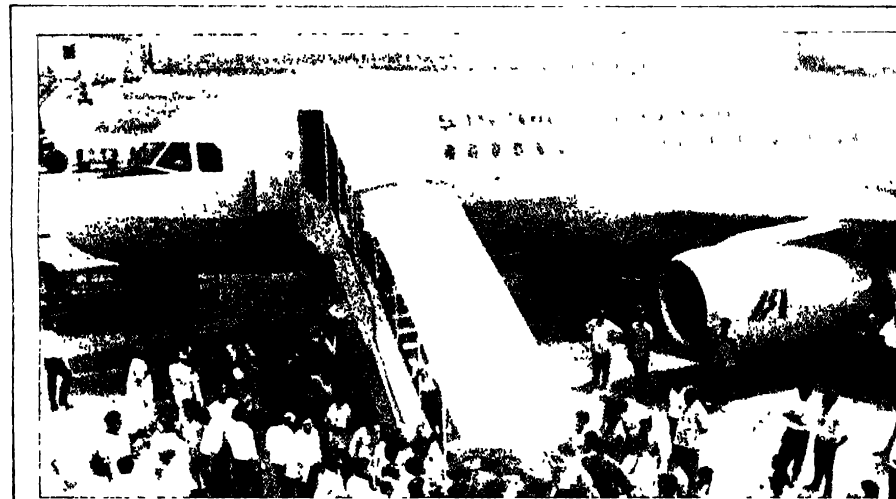


DELHI

Will the Airbus A320 fly again? The Union Cabinet will decide the fate of the 14 grounded Indian Airlines Airbus A320s only after the results of the inquiry into the 14 February crash at Bangalore are known, maintains Union civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan. "We have placed the matter before the Cabinet," he

A section of Indian Airlines personnel have already criticised the decision to ground the 14 Airbuses before the inquiry was complete as "hasty". They argue that if the cause of the crash is found to be pilot error, the grounding would prove a total waste. They also say that they expect the Airbuses to be recommissioned "in the next ten days". But sources in the civil aviation ministry maintain that it is doubtful if this would ever happen.

Some officials maintain that the



**Airbus A320: a controversial flying machine**

says, "It is for them to decide whether or not to press the Airbuses back into service." Meanwhile, Khan says, the aircraft are being maintained properly on the ground.

India will have to fulfil its contractual obligations to the French manufacturers, Airbus Industrie, he says. Whatever aircraft had been bought would have to be paid for. "But we do not want any more planes to arrive until the inquiry into the crash is complete," Khan says, and stressed that it is the Cabinet that will take the final decision.

The grounding of the Indian Airlines Airbuses has been the longest in the history of civil aviation for any aircraft. It has caused a loss of Rs 22.5 crores and a 30 per cent reduction in the airline's passenger capacity. It has also reduced its fleet to just 35 jets. Of these one was recently damaged by a bird hit in Madras.

Airbuses cannot be pressed back into service unless the court of inquiry, headed by Justice K Shivshankar Bhatt, gives a clear verdict on its airworthiness. Only such a verdict can restore the confidence of the passengers, they feel. Owing to the controversy over the exact cause of the accident, the government is unlikely to take an arbitrary decision on resuming Airbus flights.

Other officials in the same ministry, however, believe that the planes will be re-inducted in a phased manner, at the rate of two to three aircraft a week. Indian Airlines has completed all preliminary checks on the aircraft, they maintain, and engineers and pilots have been regularly undergoing refresher courses for flying the aircraft. So, while the controversy rages about its safety standards, the fate of the aircraft hangs in the balance. •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



# Keeping options open

*The Bodo talks raise hopes of peace even as extremists go on the rampage*



ASSAM

A series of bomb blasts rocked Assam when the state was all set for the colourful festival of *bihu*. After a period of considerable lull, the Bodo extremists, who are fighting for a separate state of their own, struck on 12 and 13 April by blowing up a truck, a train and a bridge, and leaving several people dead and many wounded.

On 12 April, seven people—most of them Bodos—were killed when the extremists blew up a loaded truck. The militants had obviously struck at the wrong vehicle, for, their real target was a police van that was coming behind. On the same day, the extremists brought down a portion of the Manas bridge by exploding a powerful detonator and severed the state's road link with the rest of the country. But even before the people got over the shock, the extremists struck again—this time by derauling the

metre-gauge Doors Express and the broad-gauge Avad Express. The derailments, which occurred between Bijni and Chaprakata stations on the metre gauge and between Fakiragram and Sesapani stations of the broad-gauge sections of the Northern Frontier Railways, were caused by blown-up railway tracks. The accidents left 14 people dead and 53 injured.

These incidents, aimed at disrupting the state road and rail lifelines and scuttling the fifth round of tripartite talks between the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the Centre and the state government, sent shock waves through the administration. Initially, the involvement of a section of the ABSU leadership was suspected, but they vehemently denied having any link with the violence. In fact, it was for the first time that ABSU president Upendra Brahma condemned the acts

and said that agent provocateurs were behind the incidents.

Intelligence sources are tightlipped about the elements responsible for these incidents. They, however, hint at a nexus between the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) and the more extremist Bodo groups operating outside the control of the ABSU leadership. It is widely believed that one such group, led by Prem Singh Brahma, has come into an understanding with the ULFA.

ing signs that the movement is going out of its control. Significantly, therefore, the ABSU chief Brahma not only denied any link of his organisation with the recent spate of violence, but for the first time, condemned the acts.

The chief secretary of Assam, H.N. Das, who was a member of the Assam team at the New Delhi talks, described the formation of a working group as a move in the right direction. "There is such a vast gap between what they are demanding and what could be offered that it is impossible to thrash out differences in a bigger forum," the chief secretary said. He also disclosed that the agreement regarding the formation of the committee was preceded by a series of informal meetings in which all the parties

**What makes the situation particularly tricky is the state government's decision to treat the Bodos on a par with other plain tribals**



(From left) Paswan, Brahma and Mahanta: a fruitful dialogue

In the wake of the renewed spurt of violence by the Bodo extremists, the setting up of an eight-member panel at the tripartite talks on 18 April to go into the Bodo question came as a welcome relief. A proposal for the formation of such a panel mooted by the Centre and the state government was earlier rejected by the ABSU and Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC), because the demand for a separate state was not included in the panel's terms of reference. The position has not changed substantially even now with the Centre reiterating its opposition to any further division of Assam, but the Bodo leaders decided to climb down. The ABSU's year-long and, often violent, agitation has so far achieved nothing. Instead, it has completely ruined the economy and thrown life out of gear. Moreover, the ABSU cannot ignore the disquiet-

tried to find a way out. The panel is to submit its recommendations before the next round of tripartite talks on 2 July.

The Union minister of social welfare, Ram Vilas Paswan, has rejected outright the demand for a separate state as "not feasible". And chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta ruled out the creation of autonomous districts for the Bodos and other plains tribes. Mahanta's call to the Bodo delegation to work out a realistic formula acceptable to all was received well. The ABSU supremo, Upendra Brahma, discovered a "positive" note in the chief minister's approach, though Mahanta virtually rejected two of the three Bodo demands. Significantly, Mahanta expressed his opposition to the formation of an autonomous district council on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.



only and was silent on the possibility of granting autonomy to areas demanded for Bodoland.

An agreement was, however, reached on the fundamental Bodo demand for effective devolution of power to the tribals. The tripartite meeting conceded the inadequacy of the existing arrangements. The panel, which was formed, has been formally asked to "work out details of an administrative, political and legal arrangement for devolution of powers acceptable to all sections of the people".

But the phrase "acceptable to all" which was inserted at the insistence of the state government is seen as something vague and impossible to achieve. There are bound to be differences in perception, feel political observers over what could be considered a realistic formula for the devolution of power. What makes the situation particularly tricky is the state government's decision to treat the Bodos on a par with other plain tribals and its refusal to work out any special arrangement for them. This attitude of the government is reflected in terms of reference of the panel, which is expected to "recommend a suitable solution to the political and developmental problems of the Bodos and other plain tribes within the framework of the Constitution of India".

The state government has valid reasons for insisting on this approach. Tribal unrest is not confined to the Bodos alone, and any separate arrangement for them is sure to encourage the other ethnic groups to raise similar demands. And if all the plain tribal communities are to be given autonomy, the state will be reduced to a confederation of regional units resulting in the dilution of its constitutional authority.

However, Brahma, though he has welcomed the formation of the panel as a "step forward", has also declared that its recommendations are not binding on the ABSU and that it is free to reject them, if they fail to come up to its expectation. But the fact is that the panel has not been formed to examine the feasibility of forming a separate state of the Bodos but to find a solution to the ethnic problem within the parameters of the state of Assam. So, if Brahma and his followers do not systematically tailor their expectations, they may be in for some disappointment in the next round of tripartite talks. •

**Rabijit Chowdhury Guwahati**

## Nature in ruins

*The Congress(I) accuses the BJP of encouraging large-scale felling of trees in Bastar*



MADHYA  
PRADESH

The forests of Bastar are being threatened. Former chief minister Moti Lal Vora of the Congress(I) has accused Baliram Kashyap, the state's tribal welfare minister, and other Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders in Bastar of encouraging the illegal felling of about one lakh trees during the last month and a half.

Vora undertook an extensive tour of this tribal dominated district and travelled about 400 kilometres accompanied by Javal Singh, a former home minister and several Congress(I) leaders from Bastar and Raipur districts. The team, which visited Jagdalpur, Narayanpur and Kondgaon, had to walk long stretches in forest tracts where no vehicles could enter in order to collect first-hand information.

In his report to the Congress(I) president Rajiv Gandhi, and the Union minister of state for environment Maneka Gandhi, Vora has complained that the process of denudation began soon after the Lok Sabha polls last November and reached a feverish pitch on the eve of the Assembly polls in February, with the BJP playing a leading role in inciting the local tribals to resort to illegal felling.

According to Vora, BJP workers promised the tribals that any land cleared by them would become theirs. The party workers even said that if the BJP was voted to power, the party would issue *pattas* (ownership documents) in respect of all such land. Vora cites various instances where large-scale felling was carried out in response to this declaration.

The former chief minister told SUNDAY that 15,000 trees were felled in Bhanpuri Assembly constituency of minister Baliram Kashyap who was the sitting BJP MLA. Showing a host of photographs of the depredation

caused, Vora said that even though the tribals loved trees, they were land-hungry too. The poor villager, encouraged by the BJP's assurance, felled the trees but has refused to clear them as no *pattas* have been issued after the BJP came to power. In his report, Vora says that the trees are lying in a number of villages, and any visitor to the area could have a glimpse of the destruction that has been caused. The report also states that even the Angerveli National Park and a reserve



**Felled trees in Bastar: wanton destruction**

forest around it, about 30 km from Jagdalpur, have not been spared.

The Congress(I) team has secured the signed statements of about 60 tribals from different villages, who have agreed to depose before any enquiry commission that might probe this well-engineered ecological scam. Meanwhile, the state forest department has prosecuted about 100 tribals on charges of illegal felling. The BJP has thereby committed a double fault, first by failing to issue the *pattas* for the cleared lands as promised by them before the Assembly elections, and then by instituting cases against those who responded to its allurements.

Kashyap, has however, categorically denied any involvement of the BJP in the matter. His argument is that the Congress(I) government, headed by Shyama Charan Shukla, was in power when the fellings had taken place. Kashyap wonders why the Congress(I) regime failed to take any action against the offenders, especially if they were BJP workers.



Kashyap has accused the Congress(I) of trying to divert attention from its own misdeeds by pointing an accusing finger at the BJP. The minister has said that Thakur Jagat Pal Singh, a Congress(I) general secretary and member of the Rajya Sabha, had felled trees and sold timber worth rupees one crore in Raigarh district when Vora was the chief minister. Kashyap has also said that a large number of trees were felled around Bhopal during the Congress(I) rule and also to facilitate the construction of former chief minister Arjun Singh's Kerwa palace.

Apprehending that the Congress(I) was going to trumpet the issue to embarrass the government, chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa, rushed a team of BJP leaders to Bastar to coun-

## This land is my land

*Hmar militants step up their campaign for an autonomous district*



MIZORAM

A tract of hilly land in north Mizoram is fast turning out to be the new powder-keg in troubled north-east. This is the land of the Hmar community, a disgruntled tribe in the border region. For the last 13 months, this Mongoloid tribe has been waging a relentless struggle, often using the vintage pre-1942 weapons, against

the Mizoram government for an autonomous district council under the sixth schedule of the Constitution in north Mizoram bordering Manipur.

Though no major skirmish has been reported in the Hmar highlands recently, the tone of the statements issued by the Hmar People's Convention (HPC), a three-year-old forum of this backward tribe, is becoming increasingly strident and belligerent. While S. Khuwa, its information secretary, warns of a "civil war" on the Aizawl administration, HPC president Hmingchhunghnung, in a memorandum to Prime Minister V. P. Singh last week, has made it clear that "HPC volunteers will give a befitting reply" if the Mizoram government continues its "atrocities" on the Hmar agitators.

Such statements have predictably alarmed the Congress(I) government in the state. There is a growing feeling in Aizawl that the Hmar belligerence, if not properly tackled now, is bound to graduate into insurgency. Last week, Mizoram's IGP (inspector general of police) Lalchhunga, along with a Hmar Congress(I) worker, went to Hmarkhawlien, a quiet village in east Cachar, near the border of both Mizoram and Manipur, to gauge the extent of Hmar militancy. Said C. L. Ruala, Mizoram's soft-spoken home minister, "It would be unfortunate if another insurgency rears its head in Mizoram. We had enough of Lal-

denga's insurgency, which we could wrap up after a prolonged peace talk."

What the Hmars are resenting is the alleged punitive action by the Mizoram armed police (MAP) against the HPC hardcores even inside south-west Manipur, which is dotted by wooded vales having a sizeable Hmar population. According to a list of atrocities released by the HPC, five Hmar girls, including two daughters of Lalhman-gata, director of intelligence of the HPC, were gang raped by the MAP.



Baliram Kashyap: under fire

ter the Congress(I)'s campaign. The team ended its three-day tour of the district on 18 April and Chandra Shekhar Sahu, one of its members, told SUNDAY that the Congress(I)'s charges were baseless. He said that the Congress(I) was trying to raise the bogey of denudation because it was alarmed by the fact that the BJP had won the support of the tribals and was trying to make things difficult for them by accusing them of resorting to illegal felling. Sahu has also tried to counter the Congress(I) by suggesting that Vora—while he was the chief minister—had given protection to Alvi Baba, one of the most notorious timber smugglers in the state.

With both sides levelling charges against each other, the real issue is getting diffused behind a maze of conflicting claims. But even if Vora's charges are partially true, the state government and the Union environmental ministry will have a lot to answer for.

**M. V. Kher/Raipur**



Officials at a Hmar outpost: mounting tension

Lalmierena Hmar, a shop-keeper, was lynched to death by police, and Vanhlana, an HPC activist, died in police custody. The HPC leaders allege that these were part of "retaliatory measures" by the MAP to snuff out the brewing Hmar movement.

Chief minister Lalhmanhawla told SUNDAY that his government was ready for peace talks with the HPC, on the condition that its members surrender all arms to create a congenial atmosphere for such talks. But Hmingchhunghnung says the question of arms surrender does not arise.

Last week the HPC took their demand to New Delhi. A six-member delegation, led by Hmingchhunghnung, apprised V. P. Singh of the upsurge among the 1.20 lakh Hmars. Time will only tell if North Block can afford to have another barbaric fire in the north-east when it is yet to make any breakthrough in the effort to solve the Manipur and Naga insurgencies.

**Santanu Ghosh/Aizawl and Churachandpur**



VIBHOR



Chief minister Sharad Pawar: Ignoring partymen

# Under pressure

*Congress dissidents corner Sharad Pawar*

**W**hen Sharad Pawar retained Maharashtra for the Congress in the last Assembly elections in the face of a total rout of the party in central and northern India, he was hailed as a saviour by all sections of the state Congress—loyalists and dissidents. But no sooner had Pawar been sworn in as chief minister for the second term running and formed his ministry, it was back to the same old game of factional politics. And the CM himself is to be blamed for it: Pawar formed a Cabinet so small that it left most minister aspirants disillusioned.

Pawar's two-tier ministry, comprising 15 Cabinet ministers and just seven ministers of state, is not only top heavy but an overburdened one as well. The junior ministers hold as many as six to eight portfolios each and they clearly cannot cope with the tremendous work pressure. For instance, on most days, Arun Mehta sits late into the night to dispose of files of

the various departments he looks after—ranging from home and labour to employment and environment. The state of Arun Gujarathi is no better. Officials of the general administration department (GAD) have not seen their minister for quite some time since Gujarathi is too busy with the other portfolios—land reforms and welfare, protocol, employment guarantee scheme and information and publicity to name a few—under him. And Shyam Ashtekar spends most of his time shuttling around the departments of industry, social welfare, excise, sports, health and tourism. Since most of the ministers of state are new faces, they are having a trying time managing business.

Whatever be the aim of Sharad Pawar's strategy of appointing greenhorns to look after so many key departments, the immediate fallout has been a total confusion within the Mantralaya—the seat of the government in Maharashtra. And since most of the junior ministers are yet to

grasp the nuances of governance, they are increasingly relying on the bureaucracy to bail them out of tricky situations. The result the bureaucracy in Maharashtra has begun to assert itself like never before. Said an insider: "Even the junior-most bureaucrat is feeling important these days."

No wonder, the bureaucracy is influencing key appointments and many of them are even occupying positions of power. Take, for instance, the recent appointment of K. Padmanabiah, a former sales tax senior officer, as commissioner of the Bombay Municipality. True, there were very few takers of the prized post primarily because any government appointee would have to face a difficult time in the Shiv Sena-ruled municipality. But the bureaucracy managed to successfully wangle the post for one of its members. And insiders aver that this was possible because municipal affairs is under a junior minister, who has little time to attend to civic matters.

There are other instances of bureaucrats swinging policy decisions. It was a long-standing tradition that all senior appointments were announced to the press as soon as a firm decision was taken on the matter. Thus it often happened that senior bureaucrats came to know of the changes from the newspapers. No longer. Now a decision has been taken to first inform the bureaucrat in charge of the particular department, who would in turn pass on the news to the press.

Mantralaya sources indicate that the sole reason behind all this is the enormous burden on the ministers, who are forced to leave even key decisions to bureaucrats. The only way out perhaps is to expand the Cabinet, but Sharad Pawar is in no mood to oblige. Jayantrao Tilak, chairman of the Upper House, told newsmen recently that he is sure that "there would be no expansion till after the budget session". Which means that no more ministers would be



added to the existing team in the next three months

**O**ne reason why Sharad Pawar is turning a deaf ear to repeated demands by Congressmen to expand the Cabinet is perhaps because he is convinced that even though some of his colleagues are making noises, they are incapable of ganging up against him.

But those who thought that Sharad Pawar will challenge the authority of Congress president Rajiv Gandhi are sadly mistaken. Even though Pawar rules Maharashtra, instructions come from the high command. The appointment of Shushil Kumar Shinde as president of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) is a classic example. The chief minister wanted Shinde to relinquish his charge of the urban development portfolio once Shinde was elected chief of the MPCC. But Rajiv Gandhi apparently insisted that Shinde hold both the posts and Pawar readily obliged his party boss.

Pawar can, however, least afford to dwell on the slight over Shinde's appointment. With the budget session



**Shinde: holding dual posts**

not very far off, the chief minister's immediate concern is the wafer-thin majority that his party commands in the Assembly. In a House of 288, the Congress has a strength of 142 members. Of course, Pawar's government has the support of 11 independents. Though a couple of desertions will not actually bring down the government as it did in neighbouring Goa, but the fear that Pawar may not be able to push through key legislations persists. And such a feeling is not entirely unfounded. In the last session, for instance, Pawar and his men lost face

when the crucial Zilla Parishad Bill was defeated in the lower House.

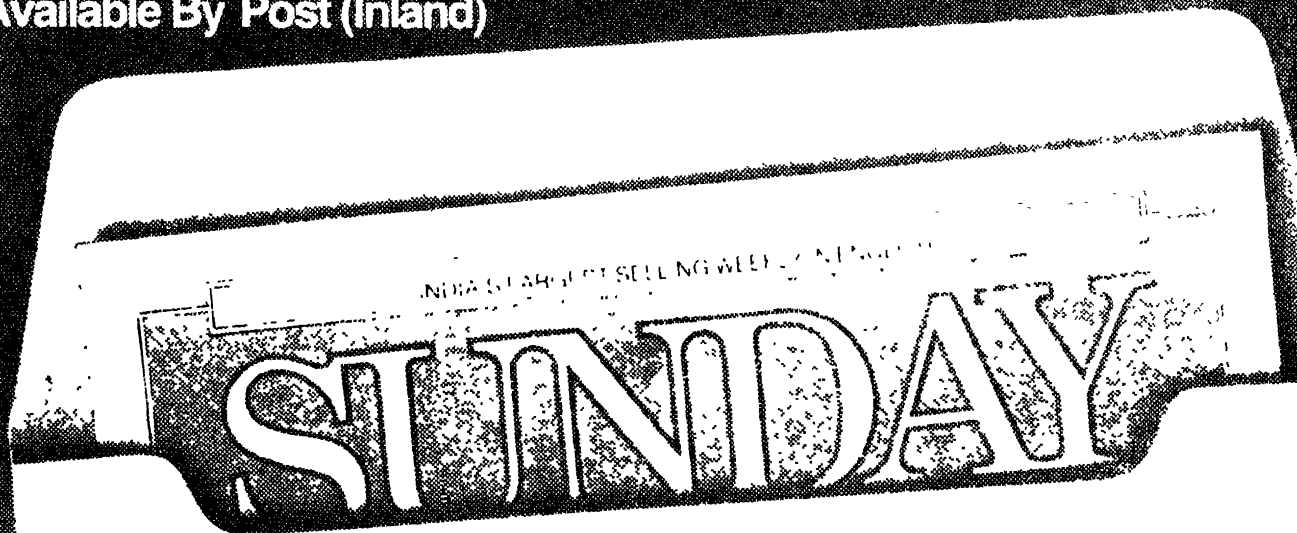
A section of the Congress camp in Maharashtra has alleged that the chief minister is trying to divert the attention of the people from pressing issues by raking up the age-old A R Antulay case. There is a strong suspicion in the state's political circles that B.S. More, the person who has filed a petition in court for the prosecution of the former chief minister on charges of corruption, is actually a front-man of Sharad Pawar. The allegation to say the least, has embarrassed the chief minister considerably.

And there are other tricks that the dissidents are playing. Some of them are reportedly seeking legal opinion on moves to topple the present government. One such strategy involves the resignation of 25 to 27 party MLAs from the House.

But these are speculations and the chief minister's supporters aver that all Congressmen will ultimately have to rally round Pawar since he alone is capable of warding off the BJP-Shiv Sena threat. After all, survival comes before anything else. •

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**

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# Press-gang tactics

*Syed Ashraf's version of how V.P. Singh forged Opposition unity*

It's hard to say if he's serious. But if Prime Minister V P Singh's former secretary, Syed Ashraf's claims are to be believed, he has a document in his possession that could seriously embarrass his ex-employer. This, Ashraf says, is a press release Singh was on the point of issuing when he was head of the Jan Morcha. It contains the names of seven politicians whose foreign bank accounts Singh had ordered Fairfax Inc. of the US to investigate when he was finance minister under Rajiv Gandhi.

His sole purpose, Ashraf says, was to 'force' troublesome politicians to cooperate with him in his bid to forge a united Opposition. The statement, which was eventually withheld, names Arun Nehru, N T Rama Rao, Biju Patnaik, Ramakrishna Hegde, George Fernandes and two others.

Ashraf quit his post as V P Singh's secretary in September 1989. The politician from Karnataka alleges that he took this step because of the Raja's "association with the CIA." And how did he get hold of the press statement he is now threatening to release? "I found a copy of it lying with me after I left him (Singh)," Ashraf explains.

V P Singh was Rajiv Gandhi's finance minister until February 1987. In 1986, he commissioned Fairfax Inc. of

the US to investigate the foreign accounts of several Indian politicians. A controversy erupted over the propriety of using a foreign agency with CIA links to look into the affairs of Indian politicians. Singh was shifted to defence and subsequently expelled from the Congress(I). He swore to bring the Opposition together to fight the Rajiv Gandhi regime. Ashraf recalls that he was determined to forge Opposition unity by hook or by crook. Hence the press release about the list of Opposition leaders he had planned to investigate—a chit of paper which, according to Ashraf, was meant to force his detractors to fall in line.

V.P. SINGH



**Ashraf has a document which could seriously embarrass his ex-employer. The PM, if his former secretary is to be believed, used this to 'force' troublesome politicians to cooperate with him**

of the National Front.

Ashraf's claims sound fantastic. Was it a mere 'statement' that shaped the destiny of the Opposition and eventually made V P Singh India's Prime Minister? "Not exactly," replies Ashraf. "But it was part of his (V P Singh's) policy of divide and rule. And he is still at it."

Ashraf now complains of being followed by Intelligence Bureau sleuths on orders of the Prime Minister. "I was recently told that if I did not surrender to V.P. Singh within 15 days, I would be in serious trouble," he complains. But he refuses to give in. He has written two letters to the Prime Minister. In the first, he has reminded him about his commitment to disclose the names of the recipients of the Bofors kickbacks within a month of coming to power. In the second, he has drawn Singh's attention to his earlier bid to investigate the foreign accounts of many who are now his colleagues in the party and the government.

But what is Ashraf waiting for? When will he reveal Singh's statement? "I will make the letter public at the opportune moment," he says cryptically.

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



**SYED ASHRAF**

N.TIN RAI



# The killer feast

*Several die of food poisoning in a village near Lucknow*

**T**he feast proved to be fatal. On 15 April, all roads led to Raipur village on the fringes of Basti town, about 190 km from Lucknow where Chaudhary Mewa Lal, a supplier of building materials and a small landowner was celebrating his engagement. Nearly 350 people had been invited for the *tilak* ceremony. Hardly had the first batch of 100 guests begun eating, when disaster struck. Some of the people threw up immediately, and were gripped by fits and convulsions.

At first, these symptoms were seen as epileptic fits, but when more people began to show the same signs, it became obvious that it was a case of food poisoning. According to Dr S.K. Agarwal, chief medical officer at the Basti Civil Hospital, the poison was contained in the *puris*, and his observation is corroborated by eyewitnesses who say that the cooking oil or the flour was contaminated, but probably it was the latter, because none of the victims suffered from diarrhoea. Contaminated oil, the doctor explained, contains the anjimonex group of toxins which causes diarrhoea. Dr Agarwal believes that the flour probably contained some compound of phosphorous or sulphur that are present in pesticides. Mewa Lal, however, rules out any such possibility, saying that the wheat was grown on his own field and was soaked for a whole day in water before being ground into flour. Besides, since he is a seasoned farmer, he claims he knew exactly

what quantities of pesticides were to be used.

Once the gravity of the situation dawned on the people, the affected were rushed to the nearby hospital. But there were worse things in store for them. At the Basti Civil Hospital, there was only one doctor and a handful of nurses to attend to them, and worst of all no medicines. The fact that doctors belonging to the UP Provincial Medical Services had gone on

an indefinite strike from 4 April to press for their demands (see *SUNDAY*, 22-28 April), complicated matters. Nearly 50 out of the 115 victims who were sent to the Basti hospital died for want of medical care. Many perished on the way to the hospital. The bodies of those who died at the hospital were carried away by their relatives, who did not want to get involved in the procedural complications of a post-mortem. This made it difficult to

determine the exact number of casualties. While the district administration placed the toll at 64, independent observers said the number could be as high as 85.

The administration, which acted surprisingly fast, forced medical stores to open that night and even requisitioned the services of 12 private practitioners. But the measures proved to be grossly inadequate. To press in more doctors, it ordered the release of 21 medicos of the district who were arrested during the strike. Strangely, none of them showed up at the hospital until the next morning. Repeated summons from the administration went unheeded. It was only when they were told that the members of the victims' families and the local people were extremely agitated and that the administration would not be able to protect them in the event of an outbreak of mass fury that the doctors reported to work, on 17 April, two days after the tragedy. But by then it was too late. •

**Radhika  
Ramesh/Lucknow**



(Top) Patients undergoing treatment at the Basti Civil Hospital; the relatives of the victims: who is responsible?

KRISHAN SAITH





## Early on in the game CMC realised that the latest technology in the world can

A solution in information technology is not a

work of art to be seen and admired from a distance. It has to function in real life.

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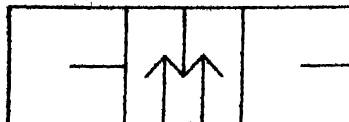
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Madhu Dandavate: agitations begin at home

## DANDAVATE VS DANDAVATE

When charity begins at home, so do agitations. Ask Madhu Dandavate.

The finance minister was recently *gheraoed* by

the Mahila Dakshata Samiti at home, the organisation protesting the recent steep rise in prices. And leading the ambush was none other

than the minister's wife, Pramila Dandavate, who is also president of the Samiti.

Hectoring Dandavate on the hardships his budget had wrought on the common man, the ladies enunciated several measures to bring prices down.

The minister listened them out patiently (having very little choice in the matter) and promised to do his best to improve the situation.

No doubt, the Dandavates made up soon after this minor confrontation. After all, Pramila hadn't taken on her husband in the full glare of the TV cameras *à la* Rani Sita Devi.

## HE HAS THE TIME, AFTER ALL

When he took over as anchor person for the Channel Four chat show, *On The Other*



Shekhar Kapur: no blink-and-miss performance this time

*Hand*, targeted at the Asian community in England, Shekhar Kapur was asked whether he'd do a similar programme for Doordarshan.

No, said the hirsute charmer, "I don't have the time."

Fair enough.

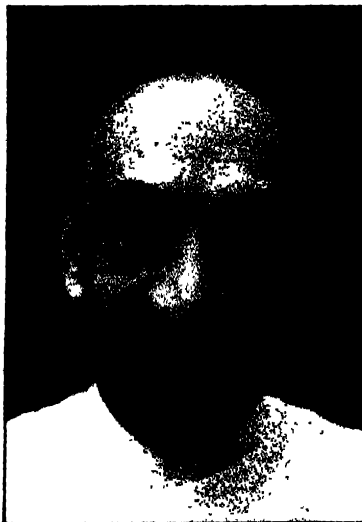
But obviously, Shekhar has since revised his schedule, or there's more to Kavita Chaudhary than the Surf (Lalitaji) ad, for Kapur has agreed to play the male lead in the sequel to *Udaan*. (Remember the serial on a female police officer that once regaled television viewers at prime time?)

*Udaan II* will tell the story of the emotional maturation of the heroine and Shekhar, by all accounts, will merit more than the three-second appearances he was fobbed off with the first time round.

## SAI BABA FOREVER

You can take a President out of politics, but you can't take politics out of a President. Well, not if he's Junius R. Jayewardene, anyway.

The former Sri Lankan head of state was recently in India, to call on Satya Sai Baba at his Puttapurthi ashram. But, apparently, there was more to the visit than met the eye. Jayewardene, insisted insiders, was here on a secret mission: to convince the Sai Baba to



Satya Sai Baba (left) and Junius Jayewardene: move over, Sushil Muni

mediate in the current dispute between New Delhi and Colombo. Evidently, President R. Premadasa is an ardent devotee of the curly-haired producer of Omega watches, and would abide by the Baba's verdict.

The godman has, reportedly, already had a secret meeting with V.P. Singh in this connection. So, will it be another Indo-Sri Lankan accord instead of the obligatory *vibhuti* at the next *darshan*?

Watch this space.





Ustad Amjad Ali Khan: no to tobacco companies

## SMOKED OUT

It took one venerable classical musician to stand up for another.

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan seemed to have a point when he took on the And *sarod* maestro

government for its indifference towards the classical music scene in general and Pandit Ravi Shankar in particular.

The immediate provocation for

Ustad *saab's* outburst was the function held to felicitate

Panditji on his 70th birthday. Fumed Khan (with thick black smoke coming out of his ears), "The government should itself have taken the decision to felicitate the maestro, instead of letting a tobacco company take the initiative... Nothing can be more distressing than the government's apathy towards a genius whose contribution to Indian classical music has no parallel."

## ALYQUE SHOWS THE WAY

The Rajiv Raj and breakfast meetings with Prime Minister Gandhi may be a thing of the past. But Lintas chief and theatre person Alyque Padamsee hasn't tired of handing out gratuitous advice as to how Doordarshan fare could be substantially improved.

At a Rotary Club meeting organised in Bombay, Padamsee held forth on how television could be redeemed in the country. His suggestions: scrap the 13-week time period for sponsored programmes and

let the highly-rated serials continue beyond the deadline; introduce methods to gauge viewership levels and audience reaction; reconstitute the boards of Prasar Bharati and bring down the price of colour television sets to Rs 1,000.

And most important:

**Alyque Padamsee: creative director, Doordarshan?**

appoint a creative director for Doordarshan.

"Imagine running a newspaper without an editor or an advertising agency without a creative director," said Padamsee.

Likely candidates? Well, you could try smart Alyque himself.



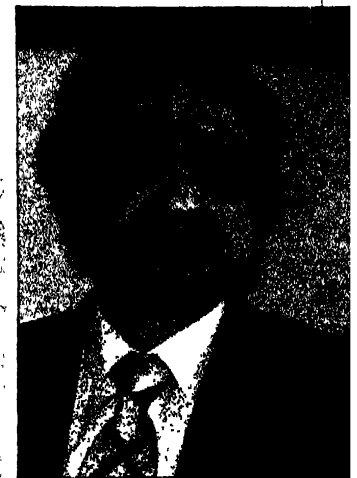
## OFF THE CART

Question: what do you

do to retain your sanity when you're serving time in the rural development ministry?

Well, if you're Vinod Chandra Pande, you write the "heartfelt story of the Fairfax years" in verse.

Yes, that's how the Raja's cabinet secretary



**Vinod Pande: verse and worse**

describes his latest collection of poems titled *Upsamhar* (Epilogue). Pande, who's been at poetry writing for years altogether, publishing 26 books in all, hasn't found too wide a readership as yet.

But the Fairfax poems could well change all that. If you have any doubts try this one called *Aatank* (Terror):

They are dictating their report  
Proving that what I did was wrong  
Justice Thakkar and Natarajan will give me suffering as a gift  
Will the animosity of the state last?  
Will I get off the cart?



**F**or years racing has been regarded as the rich man's sport and the Bombay race course as the richest and best racing centre in the country. The high stakes, the frenetic betting on racing days, the Mercedes Benzes sweeping into the Mahalaxmi Race Course, and the reign of the champagne-and-caviar brigade on Derby days, have all contributed to the aura of the upmarket sport. But it took a diehard trade unionist such as Dr Datta Samant to expose the grime beneath the glitter. The rebellion brewing among the syces or the stablehands, at the Royal Western India Turf Club (RWITC) came out in the open when a 1,000-odd syces struck work on 15 April.

Datta Samant, pleading the case of the syces at the ministerial level, maintained that their service conditions were abysmal, and that they would not resume work until all their demands were conceded. The owners offered a 50 per cent hike in wages, but even that didn't satisfy the trade union leader. The strike, he insisted, would continue till the bitter end. But the intervention of Maharashtra minister of state for home Arun Mehta made the strikers see reason. On 21 April the strike was called off, but not before it had put the fear of Datta Samant into the Bombay racing authorities.

The decision was so sudden that even the Western India Trainers Association (WITA), which had been negotiating with the Race Course Kamgar Union led by Divekar, for a rise in the syces' pay packet, was taken by surprise. Says T Colasso, chief security officer of the RWITC: "The syces had a contract with the Divekar union which ends on 31 May this year. But even before that contract expired they joined the Datta Samant union. On 14 April they gave a 15-day strike notice. But the very next day they went on a flash strike."

Datta Samant had, obviously, caught the WITA and the RWITC on the wrong foot. Without the syces (who are employed by the trainers on behalf of the horse owners) to "roll the horses", feed them and look into their daily needs, the authorities were in a fix. There are about 1,000 thoroughbreds on the premises of the club—some of them priced at several lakhs of rupees—and there was no one to tend to them. And the lack of exercise could prove fatal.

It took the authorities four days to regroup themselves, and organise



# Race-struck

*Datta Samant tries his trade unionist tactics at Bombay's Mahalaxmi course*

volunteers who led and rolled the horses under police protection. Amateur riders, horse-lovers, owners, and anybody with a little knowledge of horseflesh was roped in. But by then, one horse had already died of colic. And, as Ivor Fernandes, secretary of the WITA, and expert trainer warned: "Another 10-20 horses could get these colic attacks if the strike continues."

Another consequence of the strike was the loss in business which, according to official sources, could be anything between Rs 3 to Rs 5 crores, for

the five days of racing lost due to the strike. Says Major P.R.K. Jacob, secretary of the RWITC: "One can't predict how much the club would have earned during these five days because revenues depend on attendance."

But the strike didn't just affect the revenues of the club. The government also lost out by way of taxes. Fortunately, for the club authorities, trainers and horse-owners, the syces' strike came at the fag-end of the racing season in Bombay. "We were to have moved to Pune anyway," says trainer





**The stables at Mahalaxmi Race Course: no syces in sight**

Cooji Katrak. "Only now we have been forced to move our horses a week in advance"

**W**ith losses mounting everyday, it was in the interests of the horse-owners, trainers and club authorities to arrive at a compromise. The solution evaded them, but not for want of trying: the trainers' association made an offer which many in the racing business feel was a very generous one. Says Major Jacob "They offered to hike up the syces' wages by almost 50 per cent of their present earnings (it amounts to Rs 450), which is most generous by any standards. But, obviously, they think that they can ask for the moon and get it."

Concurs Gautam Kotwal, editor of *The Indian Thoroughbred* "It was a

fair offer, since they get accommodation and the previous union had been totally ineffective in getting them their dues. Samant has definitely succeeded in getting them much more." Kotwal argues that their intransigent attitude is not going to get them a better deal. "Because, ultimately it's the owners who pay for their wages. And even though Bombay racing is supposed to be the richest and the best, owners can't afford a 100 per cent hike. That's because the stake money, when compared to the cost of a horse and its maintenance, is not good enough."

But Samant and his workers were not willing to listen to these arguments. Says Samant, "These horses are treated like VVIPs whereas the men who slog from 5 am to midnight keeping their stables clean, feeding them, exercising them, have service conditions which are absolutely appalling. They get no dearness allowance, no provident fund, there is no ESI (Employees State Insurance) scheme though most of them have been working there for 20 years. And what is a 50 per cent rise to a person who has been earning Rs 400 or Rs 500?"

Datta Samant's intransigence had only one fallout: the trainers were now determined to "break the strike", come what may. While the jockeys, who were initially reported to have been on the side of the syces, and the riding boys pledged their allegiance to the trainers, the latter began moving their horses to Pune. Says Pesi Shroff, champion jockey, "The syces' demands were legitimate and I was in favour of them being paid more because they are an important part of the industry, now that the sport has much more money with industrial business houses sponsoring so many events."

**T**he strike may have had the racing fraternity in a fix, but it helped divert attention from the spate of controversies that champion jockeys and expert trainers have been involved in. Only last month, one of the best and brightest jockeys, Aslam Kader was suspended by the RWITC for "fixing" a race, and debarred from

racing for three years. Imtiaz Seth, a champion trainer, was suspended for nine months after his horse, Lyoz Chanette tested positive to steroids. Bezan Chenoy, yet another trainer, was said to be involved in a drug scandal but was later cleared.

Says Colasso, "It's not just an Indian phenomenon. It's there on a much larger scale in the West." Adds Pesi Shroff "Most of these stories that one gets to hear about fixing races are rumours. It's very difficult for any jockey to pull it off, firstly, because he is being watched constantly on close circuit TV, and secondly, no champion jockey will want to jeopardise his entire career by doing something stupid like that."

But, obviously, there are people like Kader who are willing to take the risk, what with the stakes being as high as they are. A jockey could pocket anything between Rs 50,000 and Rs



**Datta Samant: "What is a 50 per cent rise to a person who has been earning Rs 400 or Rs 500?"**



**T. Colasso: "Datta Samant gave a 15 day notice but went on a flash strike the next day"**

1 lakh for "pulling a favourite" while the bookmaker could gain much more, sometimes as much as Rs 10 lakhs. The higher the stakes, the greater the possibility of trainers injecting their horses with steroids.

But despite the many instances of wrong-doing, Bombay is still best-known as the richest and best racing centre in the country. And now that the syces' strike is off, despite Samant's protestations ("the syces are fighting an emotional battle and will stick by me to the end"), it will be business as usual at the Mahalaxmi Race Course. ●

**Adite Chatterjee/Bombay**



**F**arha, another eminently forgettable Bombay film product, is trying desperately to make a comeback. And by the look of it she is making all the wrong moves.

During the shooting of Raj Kumar Kohli's *Pati Patni Aur Tawaif*, she did her best to outdo Salma Agha's garish make-up and outfits (no mean task that). Once Salma's back was turned, of course, she came out with the choicest of abuses.

As if that was not enough, she insisted on wearing a belt over her sari—like Salma again—with scant regard for her obese figure, and ended up looking quite awful.

And that takes care of her comeback plans. For the moment, at least.

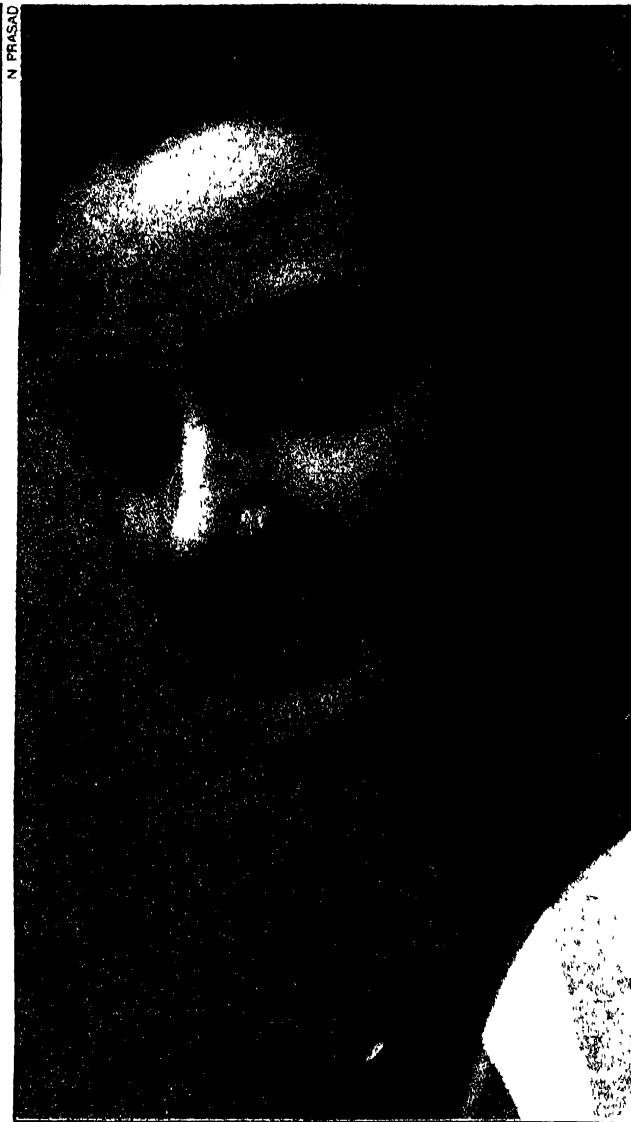


K. SUBASH

**Dharamendra : mama is better**

**P**oor Dharam, his ego has taken quite a battering of late, what with producers preferring beta Sunny and his daughters preferring mama Hema.

Apparently, both Esha and Aahana believe that their mother is the most beautiful lady in the world, and papa Dharam isn't anything to write home about. Thus, while Esha preens with pride when told that she is the spitting image of Hema, little Aahana takes grave offence at any talk to the effect that she takes



N. PRASAD

**Farha: desperate moves**

after her father. It's all loud wails and "No, I look like mummy too!" from the little one, while an embarrassed Malini desperately tries to convince her that papa's not so bad, after all.

**A**mrta Singh is not the type who would waste words on anyone. So her recent effusiveness over anything connected with Mahesh Bhatt should be regarded as highly suspect. She thinks Mahesh Bhatt is the best director this side of the Suez. She thinks he is simply wonderful with his co-stars and...the list is endless.

Now after seeing *Daddy* she's raving about Mahesh's *ben* Pooja Bhatt. Of course, she makes sure all the raving is done within Daddy's ear-shot. Obviously she is desperate enough to try anything, even Bhatt, to make a comeback of sorts.

**R**emember Jugal Hansraj, the light-eyed poppet who won every cinema-goer's heart with his scene-stealing performance in Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom*?

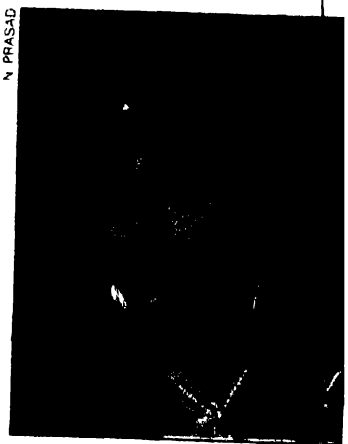
Well, Hansraj has grown up now, and is all set for a film career. Manmohan Desai will have the pri-

vilage of introducing the new improved Jugal to cine-audiences. But it's dubious honour at best, if one goes by past history. Every child actor of note—Master Raju, Satyajit, Mayur and Sachin—has proved a gonner in his adult roles.

But who knows, Hansraj might just break the jinx.

**I**t's incredible but true the ever-productive flop machine from the south, Meenakshi Seshadri, still has her admirers. Some of them, unfortunately, a little too ardent for comfort.

Recently, while filming a fight sequence on a Juhu road, Seshadri came up against one such fan. No sooner had her take been okayed, that this enterprising soul jumped the secur-



**Meenakshi Seshadri : she still has her admirers**

ity cordon, and before you could say 'ice-maiden', had the actress clasped in a passionate embrace.

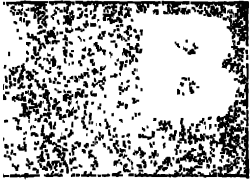
While the unit hands gawked in amazement (and some amusement), Meenakshi took matters into her own hands. The *danda*, which had only minutes ago been used on the screen *goondas*, descended on the real-life roadside Romeo. A few thwacks later, the considerably chastened voyeur was handed over to the police. And an unfazed Seshadri continued with the shoot. ●

N. PRASAD



# The right bureaucrat

*How to pick one out and then cultivate him*



Bureaucrats look deceptively like everybody else. They have a head, a body, two legs and two arms, though visitors may be forgiven for harbouring the delusion that they have been supplied by a considerate providence with more arms than the most well-endowed deity, to better enable them to accept the offerings heaped on them by a grateful and insistent citizenry. But, of course, they are not like everyone else.

A new arrival to Delhi anxious to meet and cultivate the right bureaucrat will be baffled by the fact that there are armies of them of all shapes, sizes and odours. How is he to identify whom to fawn over? First, he must rule out the non-central services and junior bureaucrats. They certainly have a role, but it's a secondary one and invoked only after the higher levels have been propitiated. Who then are the true bureaucrats?

The real bureaucrat in Delhi is a person who is truly terrified that somebody, somewhere, who is not a bureaucrat, may be making money. This is the official test for bureaucrat-hood. Next is the belief that all a businessman has to do to make money is to set up a company and instantly torrents of money, naturally black, engulf him. The thought of all this money makes even hardened bureaucrats weep bitterly.

Having obtained these two clues, the seeker looks further. In earlier days it was much simpler. All you had to do was to find the IAS initials alongside a name and it would be safe to grovel your way on hands and knees through the door. Today, alas, the world is more complex. For one, there is the infernal IAAS whose sole job seems to be to rejoice in the misguided *salaams* of the multitude who mistake them for their more abbreviated brethren. Besides, all sorts of professors and scientists and assorted others have materialised in positions of power who are not even from the government services.

However, they too can be recognised because they have adopted the attitudes of the IAS to such a degree that it can today be truly said that the IAS is less a service than a frame of mind. This mind-set is characterised by an all-knowing wisdom that sets everybody's teeth on edge, particularly journalists, since, as the world knows, the only people who know everything about everything are journalists.

in tents outside a flat. Though they pose no threat to him, he must not make the mistake of assuming that the guards indicate that the occupant must be a man of vast importance. It merely means that the person was so unpopular with his colleagues that they once managed to have him posted to Punjab.

Having identified Mr. Right, how is he to be wooed? The best guide

here is our religious heritage. Every right-thinking bureaucrat sees himself as the logical inheritor of some celestial seat. Like the preceding deities, he is pleased by *tapasya*. Meditating on Him is no longer in favour since He doesn't know you're doing it. But numerous visits, cringing in tone, supplicating humbly, accepting whatever is said with alacrity, may gain divine approval.

The sign of benediction is an agreement to go out with you. A tea is a teaser, mere foreplay, whereas a dinner is the big one. God has succumbed. During dinner keep the alcohol and your charm flowing. Laugh immoderately at his little tales. Display some self-deprecating wit. A

bureaucrat loves to feel that you have as low an opinion of yourself as he has of you. Do not commit the cardinal sin of bringing along your wife if she happens to be very beautiful because this will arouse the bureaucrat's excessive interest and his wife's implacable suspicion. Unless, of course, you really need that contract. Steel yourself. In the presence of beautiful wives, all bureaucrats emit dirty jokes. But it is still possible that all your ploys have failed and the bureaucratic God is merely laughing, as Gods will, at your hospitality, the enormous bill, and your desperation. The situation then is clearly hopeless and you should consider the ultimate step of human sacrifice, either yours or his. ●



**All you have to do to get some job done is to find the IAS initials alongside a name and grovel on hands and knees through the door**

ILLUSTRATION BY RASHI JAIN

Therefore the sound of gnashing teeth in the Press Club at the mention of a name is a reliable indicator. Another is the attacks in newspapers on a bureaucrat. Since only those people get criticised in India who are doing their jobs efficiently and effectively, the rule here is that the importance of a bureaucrat is in direct proportion to the intensity of the attacks on him and his honesty is often in inverse proportion to the allegations of corruption. The best indicator of all is the number of other bureaucrats who go to visit a bureaucrat. If the determined learner lurks outside the bushes of his target's home, he will glean this information. He will also notice nearby a posse of armed and bored policemen loitering



# Comrade Sak

*The documentary on Shapurji Saklatvala revives interest in a remarkable man*

**W**hile filming Salman Rushdie's *Riddle Of Midnight*, Christopher Mitchell first came upon the name Shapurji Saklatvala in a footnote reference. The brief biographical sketch had Mitchell intrigued. Saklatvala was no ordinary immigrant, but the first Indian to get elected to the House of Commons as early as 1922, and one among the four communist MPs in Britain.

Mitchell followed up the story, did his research and submitted a proposal to Channel Four for a film on the man who had stirred up the Commons about six decades ago. Channel Four gave the go-ahead, and so was made *Comrade Sak*, an hour-long documentary on Saklatvala.

Using rare archival material—both film clips and newspaper cuttings—the film tells the fascinating story of the Bombay-born Saklatvala (he was related to the Tatas) who went on to become one of Britain's first communist MPs. His years of left-wing activity, the harassment he underwent, his stirring speeches to the House of Commons and the towering personality of the man himself made for great prime-time fare.

Saklatvala's life story was recreated through the reminiscences of those who knew him well: his daughter Sehri Saklatvala, socialist leader Minoo Masani and the late B.T. Ranadive among others. Comrade Sak, as he was best-known, came to Britain in 1905 to recover from a bout of malaria. And stayed on to join the Independent Labour Party in 1909, to be elected to the Parliaments of 1922-23 and 1924-1929 from the constituency of Battersea North.

Saklatvala's performances in the House of Commons are brought to life by Roshan Seth who delivers his speeches with the same zeal and fervour that characterised the communist MP. Sehri Saklatvala testifies that her

father made an "immediate impact" on the Commons and it is easy to see why. Comrade Sak was no pacifist and all his addresses to the House are fired with revolutionary intent.

During a heated debate on the Simon Commission, Sak reacted strongly when the members accused Indians of resorting to evil practices such as untouchability. "People talk of untouchability," he said, "I was actually prevented from entering the White man's club (in India). Ultimately, when it could not be helped, the messenger of the club led me through the kitchen and an underground passage to a basement room where the professor (Saklatvala's host) was asked to see me."

Not being allowed into a Whites only club in Bombay in 1902 rankered and like Gandhi (who had been thrown out of a Whites only railway compartment) Saklatvala always remembered the humiliation of racism. A Liberal supporter in the earlier years, he soon switched sides to join the Labour Party. After the First World War, however, he turned communist and remained a Bolshevik supporter until his death.

Mike Squires, a taxi driver and a communist, who was brought up in Battersea North, Sak's constituency, maintains (in the film) that it was Saklatvala's communism which attracted adverse publicity, not his race. Newspaper cuttings showing cartoons describing Saklatvala as part of the "distinguished Soviet order" are cited by Squires to prove his point.



**Roshan Seth with Sehri Saklatvala: reminiscing about Shapurji**

Sehri Saklatvala recalls how her father was always under suspicion, being trailed by intelligence personnel, having his telephone tapped and his meetings cancelled at the last minute.

"It was difficult getting material on Saklatvala," recalls Mitchell. "His name is not on the catalogues, so it had to be done by talking to people who know the archive footage really well." Mitchell made do by using footage from the National Film Archives, where Sak features in a movie called *Against Imperialist War*, made by the Workers Film Club. Film clips of the MP were also procured from British Movietone and a series called *Education Television On Film*.

Also featured in *Comrade Sak* is the MP's speech on sedition, in 1926. Asking soldiers not to break the



general strike. Saklatvala reminded them that they also belonged to the working class. He was arrested for sedition and sentenced to a prison term lasting a couple of months. Highly provoked, the MP made a now-famous speech "All propaganda must be subversive. If it is not subversive, there is no need for propaganda. I, for one, will not yield to the terrorism of the state. I will carry on subversive propaganda, revolutionary propaganda, communist propaganda, international propaganda with the assistance of the Russians and the Germans and the Chinese and the British. I am not alone in that."

Sak's faith in the Bolshevik Revolution led to his gradual isolation within the Labour Party. On a trip to India, he criticised the policies of Ramsay MacDonald and Lloyd George. On his return to Britain, swift retribution followed. His passport was impounded and he was never allowed to enter India again. This action of the British government broke his heart and made him an implacable foe of Whitehall.

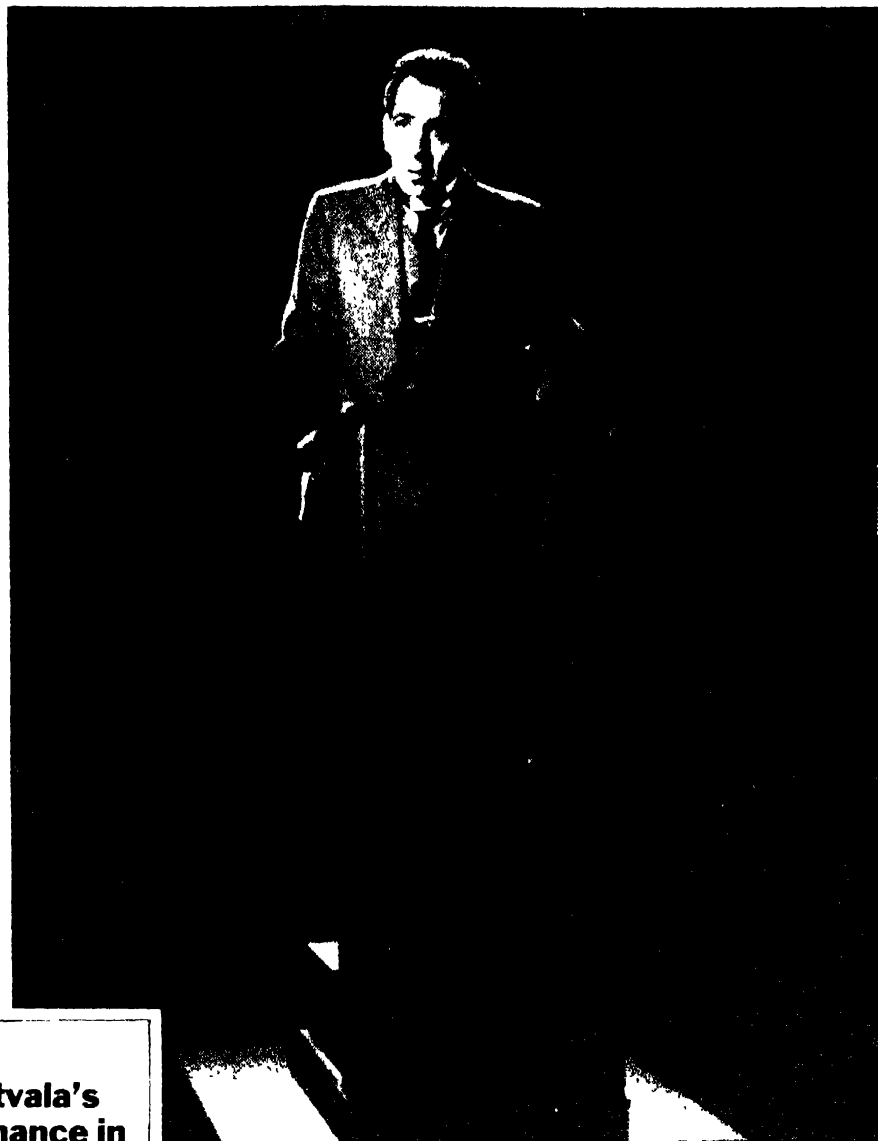
The only Indian MP in the House of Commons, Saklatvala had his own ideas on how the Indian freedom struggle should be conducted. He disliked Gandhi's style of personalised politics and his daughter recalls how he once told the Congress leader that he could stop the people from calling him the Mahatma if he really wanted to. Sak was also against the economic programme outlined by

Gandhi and in favour of industrialisation. "He did not want the well-to-do to take over the reins of power in India after independence," says Sehri Saklatvala. "He wanted power to go to the people."

In 1929, Saklatvala, protesting the approach of the Labour government to the issue of Indian independence, stood as a communist candidate from his constituency—and promptly lost the election. There was no place for a communist in British politics.

That didn't deter Comrade Sak, however. Even after his defeat he continued to work for the party, and even went on a lecture tour of the Soviet Union, concentrating on the eastern regions as he wanted to study how they had adopted communism

**Saklatvala's performance in the Commons is brought to life by Roshan Seth who delivers his speeches with the same fervour that characterised the MP**



Soon after, in 1936, Saklatvala died, a communist to the last.

While the Channel Four film recreates the life of a man whose funeral procession was one and a half miles long, there are a number of biographies on Comrade Sak in the works as well, all scheduled to hit the stands within a few months. Sehri Saklatvala

has written a personalised biography on her father, while Mike Squires is publishing his thesis on the communist leader. The third version of Saklatvala's life is being written by Marc Wadsworth, a Labour Black sections activist.

"It's pure coincidence that there is

so much on Comrade Sak at the same time," says Mike Squires. "My thesis on him was done three years ago. It's being published only now. But then, as I say, the more the better." Squires' book titled *Saklatvala: A Political Biography* will be published by Laurence and Wishart a few months from now, coinciding with the release of Sehri Saklatvala's book. Squire denies that there is a race among the three to get their books out first. "We've all been working on it differently for a long time. Just a coincidence, that's all," he says.

But coincidence or not, it has contributed to the renewed interest in a truly remarkable man. And nobody—not even the biographers—is complaining. ●

**Shrabani Basu/London**



# LAXMAN'S

*Eminent  
cartoonist  
R. K. Laxman  
captures the  
spirit of  
Calcutta with  
his pencil  
sketches*





# CALCUTTA



Calcutta is the most sketchable city I have seen. I have in my travels both inside and outside the country come across some very interesting narrow cobble lanes, high weather-beaten walls of houses dotted with dark eye-lets of windows, rows of tiled roofs with jagged edges, crumbling ruins of temples, weed-grown mansions, disintegrating ornate iron gates of stately homes, fluted pillars holding aloft facades of majestic buildings, and so on. My fingers have always reached to sketch them.

Calcutta is a treasure house of such items, for an artist born with an eye for the tragicomic in everyday life. That is why this city has been one of the most photographed, painted, sketched in the country.

Way back in history, the alien traders and colonisers took time off to fumble with paint and brush to record their impressions of the city. With the arrival of camera obscura it readily offered itself as a subject for the young novice photographers who succeeded in capturing the sombre mood of Calcutta.

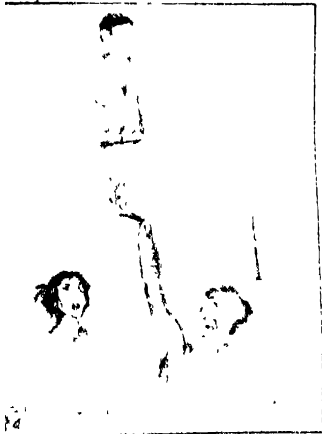




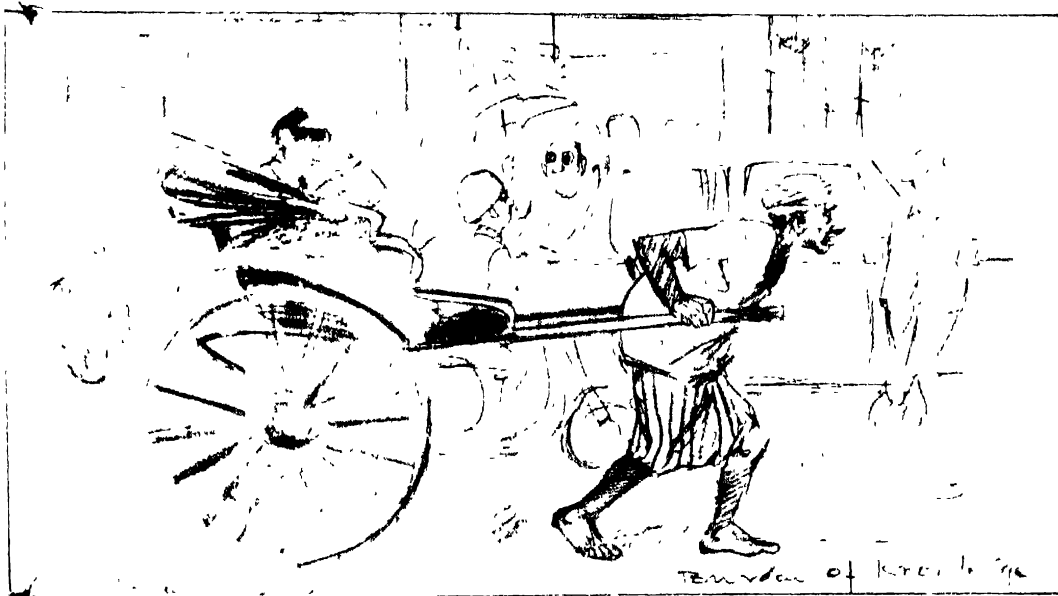
ta, in black-and-white. Now the techniques of colour photography are so advanced that it looks as if there cannot be any bad photographs at all! In respect to Calcutta particularly, any shot taken at any time, at any angle, anywhere, seems to fall automatically into a pleasing natural colourful composition. To indulge for a moment in a bit of fanciful theory, it is perhaps because the city abounds in geometrical shapes everywhere.

To start with, the Howrah Bridge full of criss-cross lines, triangles and rectangles at one end and on the other, the ubiquitous circular wheels of rickshaws, buses, push-carts, the stacked up empty tar drums, the vertical lines of the mighty public buildings, triangular roofs, curved balconies, etc. The colour is supplied by hoardings advertising TV sets and tyres, baby food and soft drinks. But the real contributions are made by the millions of tattered cinema posters stuck all along the walls of every street, every pillar, every bit of exposed space. Against this backdrop the vast theatre called Calcutta, the drama of life is enacted, involving a medley of pavement dwellers, bus passengers, trains, business executives, tourists, beggars, housewives, school children, rickshaw-pullers, scholars, holy men, wedding processions, protesters, joggers, cows, dogs, crows and so on, all in an incongruous juxtaposition. Looking at this panorama one can't help becoming somewhat philosophical and may see in all this a certain sadness, satire and perhaps an indefinable salvation.

**Calcutta is the most sketchable city I have seen. To indulge for a moment in a bit of fanciful theory, it is perhaps because the city abounds in geometrical shapes everywhere**







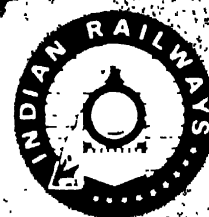
To make these drawings, I chose not pen and ink nor paint and brush but the common every day pencil. A pencil sketch has an innocent quality about it which the more elaborately worked out pen and ink drawing or painting does not seem to possess. A pencil in a competent hand will trace a visual image and capture the sharpness or softness or vagueness of an object and the result acquires a strange charm of its own. Also, a fleeting image is not a photographic representation but an after impression reliant on the memory.

The sketches are of this kind. I have left out the obvious, the familiar monuments and places. A camera is better equipped to do that job. So the viewer should not expect to see in these drawings, any resemblance to reality. If indeed there happens to be any I will say it is purely coincidental as the fiction writer would after basing the entire theme for his novel on real people and happenings! Just like he exercises poetic license, I have attempted, in graphics, some sort of fiction, so to speak. Thus the pavement dweller, the hawker, the fishmonger, the vegetable vendor, the rickshaw-puller, the bridges, the garbage heaps, the drain pipes, the bathers, the buildings, the mansions, the faces and other trivia are there, of course, in reality. But I have taken them and refashioned them after my own artistic inclinations and humorous attitude towards what goes on around me. ●

**R.K. Laxman**

Calcutta Images by R.K. Laxman. Published for the Marjushree Foundation. Calcutta by Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.





The service reaches the farthest corner of the court, deft placements, long rallies testing the stamina – and thunderous ovation.

*Meena Shah, Ami Ghia, M Mathias, Madhumita Bisi, T N Seth, Romen Ghosh, Dipu Ghosh, Suresh Goel, Asif Parpia, Iqbal Maundargi, Leroy D'Sa, K K Cheema, Syed Modi, Sanat Misra, Harjit Singh and several others.*

Each one of these badminton champs wore the Railway colours with pride and served the nation with distinction.

All evoke nostalgic memories, reflect the indomitable will to win and inspire us to reach new pinnacles of glory.

In the sports arena the Indian Railways have an enviable record – winning over twenty national sports championships each year. Every fourth Arjuna awardee represents the Railways! This symbolises the fortitude, physical fitness and team spirit among the 16 lakh-strong family of Indian Railways.

Yes, the Indian Railways have an unbeaten track record as the largest in Asia, carrying 11 million passengers and nearly 10 lakh tonnes of freight over a distance four times to the moon each day. Higher productivity and greater public service are only a few of the milestones the Indian Railways are reaching.

The endeavour to excel continues unabated as the Indian Railways echo the sportspersons dream of 'Swifter! Higher! Stronger!!!'

# INDIAN RAILWAYS

## CHAMPIONS OF THE TRACK





# Roman misadventure

*The molestation of air hostess Sabena Shetty has feminists up in arms*

It wasn't much of a Roman holiday for Sabena Shetty, an air hostess with Air India. On the contrary, the brief stopover in Rome turned out to be the stuff of nightmares. Invited to join a small get-together in the hotel room of flight purser Mahesh Lulla by fellow hostess Gail D'Souza, Shetty went over quite willingly. Little did she know then how the evening would end.

No sooner did the guests depart, leaving Shetty and Lulla alone, when the purser began making indecent advances. He asked Sabena to kiss him and when she refused, tore off her clothes in a fit of anger. He then forced whisky down her throat, which she threw up almost immediately. Waiting until she had recovered somewhat, he forced himself upon her again. Only to give up when she vomited a second time.

Gail D'Souza dismissed the incident when Shetty complained to her, advising her not to make it an issue. The next day the aggrieved hostess complained to the flight supervisor, but there was little sympathy forthcoming. Even the Air India Air Hostesses Association took no action in this regard.

Completely desperate now, Shetty filed an FIR once she was back in Bombay and approached some women's organisations for help, among them Stree Kruti, Stree Uvach, Mahila Dakshata Samiti and Stree Mukti Sanghatana.

The women's organisations tried to meet Air India managing director, Rajan Jetley, and present Shetty's case to him. But all their attempts at getting an appointment proved in vain. After several days Jetley wrote back, saying that he had received no complaint, but they could meet the Air India human resources development manager, S.R. Gupte.

Incensed at what they perceived as

the callousness of the administration, the women held a demonstration outside Air India's Nariman Point office, in which 20-odd organisations took part. Strangely enough, only one air hostess was a party to the proceedings—she had been a victim of sexual harassment not so long ago.

S.R. Gupte promised the demonstrators that action would be taken on their complaint within eight days. When nothing happened even after this assurance, the women called up Gupte to find out what was going on. Action was being taken, insisted Gupte, but he wasn't going to reveal any further information for fear that it would find its way into the newspapers.

it had happened at a party in Bombay then one would not have taken up the issue with the management."

An Air India staffer contests this position. "It is difficult to control the movements of the staff when they are off duty."

The women's groups have, however, done their homework this time round, compiling a number of cases in which male crew members have misbehaved. A few months earlier, two flight pursers had attempted to rape an Iraqi woman diplomat in Delhi. The lady lodged a complaint with the ministry of tourism and Air India, but no action was taken. In another incident in 1988, a purser molested a

woman in a Sydney hotel and the entire crew was asked to vacate the premises as a consequence.

Air hostesses are a prime target for sexual harassment. But in the absence of any organisational clout the victims never take up cudgels against their male counterparts. True, there is an Air Hostesses Association, but only 300 of the 1,100 hostesses have joined up. The majority of them prefer to belong to the male-dominated Indian Cabin Crew Association, which never takes up issues of sexual harassment or



**Feminist organisations demonstrate against Air India's inaction: woman power**

and lead to untavourable publicity. Using their own resources, the women found out that Lulla was being given ground duty—the suspension that they had asked for was unorthcoming.

**S**abena Shetty's is not an isolated case. In fact, the ever-increasing number of such incidents has led the women's groups to agitate for the inclusion of sexual harassment in the list of occupational hazards, for which Air India pays compensation. Says Sonal Shukla of the Women's Centre, "This happened when she was off duty in Rome, but waiting to take another flight after finishing an earlier duty. If

molestation

It stayed out of the present dispute as well, while Air India continued to put off any decision on some pretext or the other. Says Vibuti Patel of the Forum Against Oppression of Women: "It is obvious that Air India is playing for time."

There is no mention of the term "sexual harassment" under the heading "Indecent behaviour", says Patel, though there were 15-20 such cases last year itself.

Not that its inclusion would make things any better for the likes of Sabena Shetty. •

**Olga Tella/Bombay**



# Fumbling federation

*The AIFF is yet to take a firm stand on 'fixed' soccer matches*

**“I** f FIFA cannot stop it, how do you expect us to do it?” says P. P. Lakshmanan, All India Football Federation (AIFF) secretary referring to the blatant corruption in Indian soccer. “But we are trying our best,” is the sop he gives.

The issue was the fixing of matches at several levels, starting with the local leagues and climbing up to the national championships. In the days of the knock-out, there was no possibility of arranging match results to suit both teams in the fray. But, when the lure of increased gate money became a prime factor, there were group leagues at the preliminary and quarter-final levels, which have led to this bane of football.

The latest incidents occurred during the Federation Cup, the premier club competition of the country run by the AIFF itself in association with the host state. In the preliminary league, it was alleged, East Bengal and ITI contrived the result of their match in such a way that Dempo of Goa was ousted.

There were three teams in the cluster—East Bengal, ITI and Dempo. Playing the last match after the others were all drawn, the first two teams ended the match with a 2-2 draw. The FIFA rules stated that when the points were the same, goal difference and then the number of goals scored by each side would be taken into account. Although Dempo had drawn their matches, they had failed to score even once. So the other two teams went through to the quarter-final at Dempo's expense.

The same story was repeated in another cluster, in which JCT Mills, MRF and Mohun Bagan featured. It is alleged that the coaches of the first two teams, Inder Singh and Bob Bootland, decided to contrive the result of their match. JCT scored all the three goals in its 2-1 victory over MRF to get past Mohun Bagan on goal difference, because Mohun Bagan had beaten JCT but lost to MRF and the 2-1 margin was necessary for JCT to be ahead in the league table although it had the same number of points as Mohun Bagan.

The allegations are just what they are—accusations that cannot be proved. If two coaches talk even in secret, they may just be exchanging notes on the latest coaching trends!



**Bengal players protesting against arranged matches at Quilon in 1988**

But contrived matches have never been proved as such. In the World Cup, too, Argentina had fixed their match with Peru in 1978, winning by a whopping 6-0

margin, followed by neighbours West Germany and Austria four years later. In both cases, the intention was to oust two other strong contenders and advance to the next stage of the competition. FIFA could condemn it, but it took no specific action.

Similarly, in the Santosh Trophy championship, Karnataka and Bihar contrived to oust Bengal from the competition in Quilon. There was a hue and cry and AIFF decided that it would do away with the goal difference clause and order a replay if teams in a pool had the same number of points.

This practice was followed for a year, but again, there was controversy in Calcutta over the Airlines Trophy match between Mohun Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting. An inquiry was held and the IFA found the two clubs guilty. But if the matter is ever taken to court, both the IFA and the inquiry commission set up to investigate the incident could be made to look quite silly.

**Mohun Bagan playing Mohammedan Sporting in the controversial Airlines Cup match last year**





After this came the Federation Cup issues in Thrussoor this year. Strangely enough, the people who made so much noise over the Airlines Cup, were not as vocal when four of India's top teams were allegedly engaged in the same old game. Although some newspapers came out openly with the accusation of fixed matches, there was no concerted effort to corner the AIFF secretary who is supposed to be responsible for the competition in the federation's name.



P. P. Lakshmanan pleaded that FIFA had instructed the AIFF to abide by the rules framed by the world body, which means the goal difference clause. But the question is, is he so helpless? "I have received no report about some matches being fixed," he told a press conference. What if he had? Would he have done something about it?

It is the easiest thing for anybody, or any organisation, to hide behind rules. It is an entirely different matter to take an active interest in the game. Recent events prove that the AIFF officials have very little time to do that.

**T**ake the case of the registration of players for the Federation Cup. For the first time, this competition was held in two phases—a preliminary competition on a zonal basis and then the final round. The first part of the competition was held quite sometime ago. Since then, the transfer "season" saw many players changing clubs for the next year. The result was that some players assisting a particular club in the initial stages of the competition, found themselves opposing the same team in the next part.

The AIFF didn't have its mind clear even on this issue. Initially, it had decided not to allow such players to assist their new club, but when a team from Goa did so, they seemed to relent. And then there was East Bengal, the principal beneficiary of the transfers. Nowhere in world soccer can such a peculiar situation develop, except where professional transfer of players takes place, but even here, it is usually at the end of a contract period that it can be done.

These are just two faces of indecision and callousness that have characterised the activities of the AIFF. Anomalies apart, it is time the federation got down to some serious work because Indian football has touched its lowest ebb and there has been no sign of resurgence for many years now. Holding seminars, forming a few impressive-looking committees and holding a "clinic" now and then can do little to effect the drastic changes that are absolutely necessary.

Instead, it is still busy working the way a government department works, where results are measured in terms of money spent and numbers multiplied—without any concern for ultimate, concrete gains. The first step in this direction would be the cleaning of the Augean stables. If that is not possible, there can be no improvement ever. And the cleaning process would have to start with the prevention of malpractices. And this would include the fixing of matches. •

**Arijit Sen/Calcutta**

## Get high in Ooty.



### And have a great time in between.

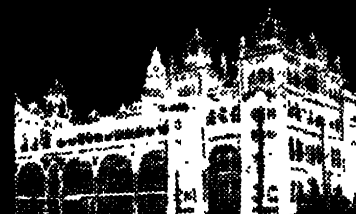
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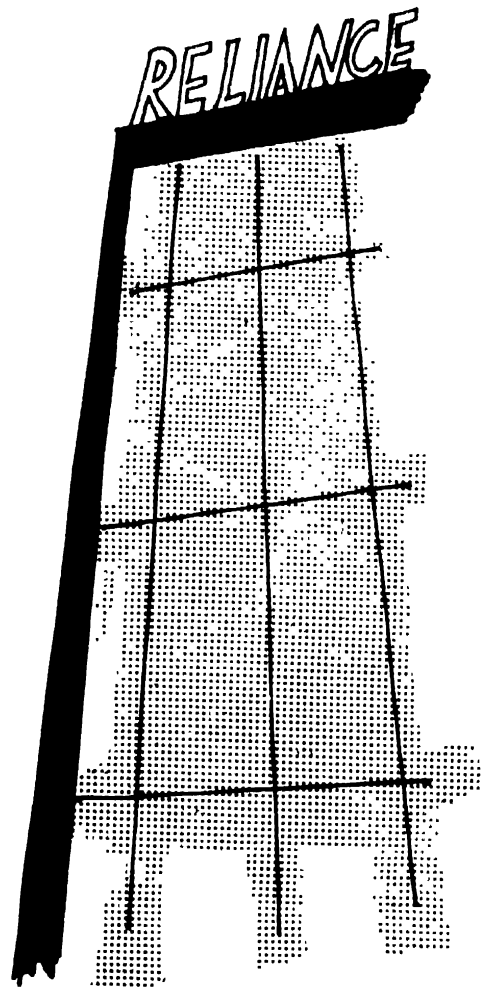
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## Games for children



■ The Bal Bhavan Society, Baroda, opened a multi-purpose indoor stadium for children recently. Constructed at a cost of Rs 13 lakhs and meant exclusively for children, it aims at providing recreation and education, particularly to children from the lower income groups.

The outcome of attention generated on the plight of children in the year 1979, (International Year of the Child) which discovered an astonishing dearth of recreation for children belonging to the underprivileged sections, the organisation is quite unique in India. In the words of Savitaben Amin,

vice-president of the society, "It provides children with an atmosphere where the spirit of play, love and adventure are kept alive." What is truly amazing about this organisation is that it offers multi-faceted programmes to over 4,500 children in the 6-16 age group. And the membership fee for needy children is Rs two and a maximum of Rs 10 for others.

## Mensa goes Indian

■ It's time for those grey cells to start working again. Mensa India, a branch of Mensa International (an organisation working for the fostering of human intelligence), is planning to intensify its work in India. According to K C Shroff, chairman of the organisation in India, Mensa aims to bring intelligent people together. Membership to the distinguished club has a clause, of course. One has to pass an intelligent quotient test. Group discussions and research have helped to bring

together the 'intelligent' people, but Mensa is always on the lookout for more people to add to its list of members.

## A step forward

■ The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is no longer a male bastion. If the role of the women constables in the Meerut riots is anything to go by, they are proving to be even better at their jobs than their male counterparts. The Mahila Battalion of the CRPF is the first women's paramilitary force in Asia and has performed remarkably well in Sri Lanka too, as part of the IPKF's operations in the island. And that is not all. These constables will now take on the formidable situation in Jammu and Kashmir too.



## The great messiah

■ This messiah belives in bringing hope into the lives of leprosy victims. Dhansuah Dave performs several daring feats on a rope stretched across the terraces of two 110-foot



high skyscrapers in Surat. At the ground level, volunteers of the Amidhara Trust and Lions International pass around the hat for donations. The proceeds are handed over to leprosy centres for the treatment of patients. Dave is not bothered about the dangers of his feat. "I will be happy if I die doing my bit for leprosy patients," he says. Spoken like a true saviour.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BASHA SIDER

## THIS INDIA

**DHOLI:** At least 40 per cent of the newly-appointed teachers in the Mithila and Bihar Universities cannot write their applications correctly either in English or in Hindi. A senior official of the Bihar University says that these teachers passed their examinations by using unfair means—*The Hindustan Times* (Deepali Sinha, Patna).



**INDORE:** About 150 government colleges in Madhya Pradesh do not have principals. Many of those who have been officiating as principals are retiring without being confirmed. According to the state minister for higher education and sports, "You order a promotion and a stay order is issued the very next day"—*The Times of India* (Sumita Singh, New Delhi).

**DHANBAD:** The villagers of Nischitpur under the Barora police station nabbed three robbers who were later identified as policemen. It is learnt that these policemen intercepted a truck near the village and robbed the driver. Later they ran away. The driver raised a cry of alarm and the three policemen were caught immediately. They have been sent to jail—*The Hindustan Times* (A. Sutyam, Patna).

**BELGAUM:** A tailor has been ordered to pay Rs 655 as compensation for a pair of ill-fitting trousers. The District Consumers' Protection Court passed the order on a complaint from Ajit Modgi who said that his tailor had stitched the trousers in a wrong measurement. Modgi claimed Rs 1,000, but the court decided that Rs 655 was fair enough—*Indian Express* (T. Venkatesh, Bombay).



BEGINNING 6 MAY 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



Your problems may not be solved this week. You are advised to be extra cautious in your dealings. A minor mistake may take its toll on you. A word of caution, be on your guard against deceit

**Good dates:** 6, 8 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 4 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



A week of brilliant prospects awaits you. Forge right ahead with your plans. The domestic front will provide you with all the support that you need. But beware of new friends and members of the opposite sex

**Good dates:** 7, 8 and 10

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 7

**Favourable direction:** North

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This will be a favourable week for you. Luck will be on your side. But keep a check on your purse strings. Sportsmen will be successful. Elderly female relatives will be of great help

**Good dates:** 9, 10 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 6

**Favourable direction:** South

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



This is not a good week for you. Your family members may avoid you and your friends will be a source of anxiety for you. Courage and fortitude will see you through. However, do not be unduly worried.

**Good dates:** 8, 9 and 11

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** South

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



A week of excellent prospects lies ahead of you. Those in service will be praised by their employers. Romance is in the air. For those waiting to get married, this is the right time to do so

**Good dates:** 6, 7 and 9

**Lucky numbers:** 6, 7 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North-west

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



A favourable week lies ahead of you. Some exciting prospects await you on the professional front. Make the best use of them and forge ahead. A hectic week of socialising is indicated

**Good dates:** 10, 11 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



A week of steady progress is in store for you. There might be problems on the professional front, but they will not hamper your progress. The domestic front may be a source for worry. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 9, 10 and 11

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 9

**Favourable direction:** East

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



This may turn out to be a fairly good week for you. Courage and patience will help you to tide over your problems on the domestic and professional fronts. Businessmen should not embark on any new venture.

**Good dates:** 7, 9 and 10

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 9

**Favourable direction:** West

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



This will be a stormy week for you. An unhappy incident at home may be a cause for concern. Be on the guard against enemies, or else they might get the better of you. Take care of your health.

**Good dates:** 8, 10 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 5

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



This is a fairly good week for you. Those connected with intellectual or artistic pursuits will be successful. Avoid any controversy for it might go against you. A journey is likely. Female relatives will be helpful to you.

**Good dates:** 6, 9 and 10

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



This is a good week to embark on new ventures. Success on all fronts is assured. Intellectuals and artists will gain recognition. Servicemen will be highly praised for their ability to take the right decision.

**Good dates:** 8, 9 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 7 and 9

**Favourable direction:** East

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



This is a good week for you. You will gain financially. But do not trust a member of the opposite sex where your profession is concerned. Concentrate on your work and do not mix business with pleasure.

**Good dates:** 7, 11 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—LEO

*This is an ideal relationship. The Leo man's dominating attitude will be resented by the Libran woman. However, her warm and generous nature will enable the two to tide over any crisis. ●*

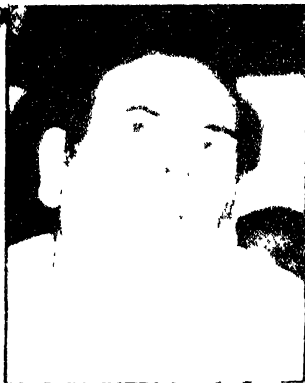


## I'm Arun, fly me

Has anybody noticed that a familiar, unmistakable shape has been missing from the corridors of New Delhi?

Yes, that's right, the redoubtable minister for commerce has been conspicuous by his absence from our shores over the last few months.

The commerce ministry confirms that Arun Nehru has been in Nigeria, England, America, Mauritius, West Germany and nearly everywhere else over the last ten weeks. But this, say officials, is because he has had work abroad.



**Arun Nehru: conspicuous by his absence**

In New Delhi, cynics have another explanation. They say that Nehru knows that things are going wrong at home and so, he's staying away as much as possible.

This may be unfair but nobody can deny that Nehru's image this time round is Teflon-coated. His performance at the commerce ministry has been impeccable and he is in no way associated with the government's failures.

No doubt Rajiv Gandhi wishes they were still on the same side.

## No line

Nothing has shaken up London's India House as much as the tenure of the current high

HEARD AT 10 JANPATHI  
**What did Veerendra Patil,  
Chenna Reddy and Sharad  
Pawar discuss at Tirupati? God  
knows!**

A CONGRESS PARTY WORKER

commissioner Kuldip Nayar. As the first high commissioner in living memory never to have been a mealy-mouthed bureaucrat, Nayar has shrugged off the constraints of protocol and opened the gates of India House to all and sundry.

Much to the foreign office's horror, he has invited Sikh militants home, gone over to Birmingham and Southall himself, recommended the axing of some of the time-servers on the mission's staff and



**Kuldip Nayar: no mealy-mouthed bureaucrat**

## THERMOMETER

### Who's on the Tau's hit list

■ **Arun Nehru:** Devi Lal believes that the Union commerce minister is behind the current anti-Chaudhary campaign being mounted in the Dal. And the Tau has his revenge all worked out: he's going to reopen the Czech pistol deal.

■ **Ramnath Goenka:** Easily qualifies as the most-hated person in the Devi Lal camp. The Chaudhary and his eldest-born, Om Prakash Chautala, are openly abusive in their references to the chairman of the Express Group, and the deputy prime minister has even written a long letter to the Raja, detailing Goenka's wrong-doings.

■ **Ajit Singh:** He has had the temerity to try and muscle in on the Chaudhary's territory and Lal is not going to forgive him in a hurry. The industry minister's recent outbursts against Chautala and his Meham visit have only turned the Tau into an even more implacable foe.

■ **Nathuram Mirdha:** He committed the cardinal sin of opposing the Chaudhary's writ in full view of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Board, and has been paying the price ever since. Among the Tau's more reasoned responses to him is included threatening to hit him with his size eleven shoes.

■ **Kapil Sibal:** Additional solicitor-general of India, Sibal found himself up against the mighty frame of the deputy prime minister soon after he took charge. During the resignation (that wasn't) drama, Lal asked that his appointment be reviewed and hasn't let up ever since.

actively courted the British media.

Consequently he has upset the deeply-entrenched lobbies in London but seems unrepentant. If he lasts at least two years (and that depends on how long VPS will last), then India House will never be the same.

And no, he hasn't been won over by the Hindus—unlike his two predecessors.

## Ground that Airbus!

The saga of the grounded A-320s gets curiously and curiously. Civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan first told the press that he would not ground the planes. Two days later, he did just that.

At the time, it was believed that they would be back in the air in a couple of weeks. Then, Arif was



**Arif Mohammad Khan: games PMO plays**

told by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to wait till the FIR on the deal was filed.

Once that was over, the ministry contemplated letting the planes fly again. This scheme was scrapped after V.P. Singh personally wrote to Arif insisting that the decision would be his and his alone.

Now, Arif has washed his hands off the whole affair. He has told friends that he thinks that the PMO is playing games with him. So, he will take no decision in the matter. ●



## Try and cap this!

It took Maneka Gandhi to make the Raja change his headgear (from original Karakul lamb to synthetic fibre). But what is it that makes V.P. Singh go through all his public engagements with his black fur cap on, in the heat of the Indian summer?

Recently at a public meeting in Bastar, Madhya Pradesh, the Prime Minister addressed a rally clad in a *bandh-gala sherwani* and his synthetic fibre cap. Every two minutes or so the Raja would remove the cap to wipe the sweat off his



**V.P. Singh: hundred per cent perspiration**

rapidly-balding pate with tissue paper. But minor repair operations over, the cap would be back in place.

Why? Apparently, an astrologer has advised V.P. Singh that he should wear his cap throughout the year or else political misfortune will strike.

Obviously, the Prime Minister's job means a hundred per cent perspiration.

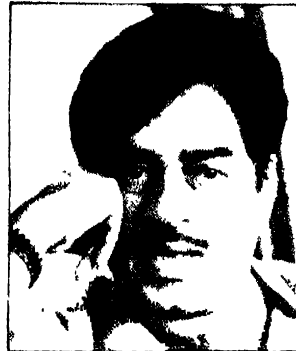
## The Tau's guided tour

The deputy prime minister is very proud of the Indian Air Force special helicopter in which he does his cross-country travelling. And not without reason, as was re-

HEARD IN THE CONGRESS PARTY OFFICE

**For 43 years we have had high commissioners of India accredited to Whitehall. Now we have one accredited to Southall.**

K. NATWAR SINGH, FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



**Devi Lal and Shatrughan Sinha: special fittings galore**

cently made evident to cine star-turned politician Shatrughan Sinha

The duo were travelling to Chandigarh on Devi Lal's plane (yes, that's what the Tau chooses to call the

chopper). when the Chaudhary asked Sinha to come and sit next to him. He had some important matters to discuss with the Dal's chief campaigner, said Lal. Sinha was only too

willing for a heart-to-heart and the leaders settled down to a cosy chat.

Lal began by leaning towards Sinha in his best conspiratorial manner to ask him if he had ever travelled in his 'plane' before. No, he hadn't, replied a considerably mystified Sinha.

Ah, said Lal, then you don't know what the speciality of this 'plane' is. It has—and here the Chaudhary's voice dropped a good two octaves—a bathroom, said Lal, taking Sinha around to the rear of the plane where the toilet was situated

## Vegetarian fare

They've been good friends for years now. So, whom should Maneka Gandhi approach when she's looking for some comforting than Ramakrishna Hegde



**Maneka Gandhi: tasting times ahead**

That's exactly where the minister of state for environment and forests headed when told that Nilamani Routray was being made Cabinet minister with the same portfolio. But far from weeping on the Planning Commission chairman's shoulder, Gandhi let the fur fly. "I'll chew him (Routray) up," she informed a somewhat bemused Hegde.

"But how can you do that," countered the former Karnataka chief minister. "You are a vegetarian."

"Yes," said Maneka, "but he is a vegetable!"

## BAROMETER

### The Hinduja and their—former?—friends



**Atal Behari Vajpayee:** The brothers' best friend and soul mate. They are pinning their hopes on the BJP though nobody is sure how much Vajpayee matters these days.



**R.K. Hegde:** Veteran property expert and Hinduja well-wisher. The brothers are a little disappointed by his failure to defend them, however. Expects attacks on himself from Hinduja-sponsored media.



**Ram Jethmalani:** Is this a divorce or merely a trial separation? Jethmalani still refuses to accept what the Bofors FIR says and agree that they were the agents. But he told SUNDAY two weeks ago that he'd stopped talking to his Shikarpuri buddies. Could this be son Tony's influence?



**Bal Thackeray:** Believes in standing by his friends through thick and thin. Has made it clear that he will defend the Hinduja against what he calls "V.P. Singh's vindictiveness."



**R.N. Goenka:** They pulled the wool over his eyes, for years. But thanks to S. Gurumurthy's probing brain, the old boy has seen the light and turned against them. Consequently, the Express no longer pretends that the brothers have golden halos and saintly hearts.



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Indian Medical Gazette 118, 223 (1984)

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**PITRODA VS UNNI: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED**

# SUNDAY

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**C**



**Probity in public life**

**A**

**HOW  
WELL  
ARE  
THEY  
DOING?**





**"The wind whispered in the trees."**

"The late afternoon of a pleasant day. The warm sun filtering down, cool grass underfoot. A time to relax, quietly chatting over a refreshing drink. And the ideal selection for such moments – the casual elegance of Gwalior Suring "

- M.A.K. PATAUDI

**GRASIM**  
**GWALIOR**  
**SUITING**  
**IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN**







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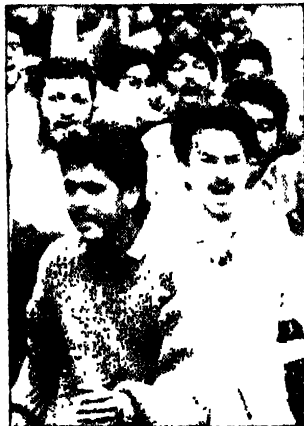


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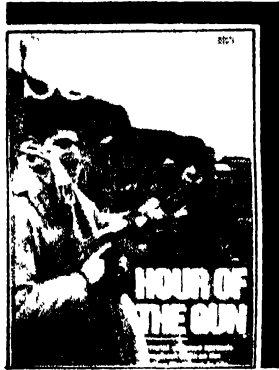
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**Cover transparency** of V.P. Singh by Rakesh Saha, of Madhu Dandavate by Nitin Rai, of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and I.K. Gujral by Rajesh Kumar and of Vinod Prande by Ashok Vahie

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## Dividing India



**BSF personnel in a curfew-bound area: is war the answer?**

**A** clash with Pakistan cannot be avoided (*Hour of the gun*, 22-28 April). Even the common man on the street knows that the situation has reached a point of no return. Instead of blaming Pakistan for abetting the terrorists, why doesn't the government come to the real cause of the turmoil? It is obvious that the political parties in India have divided the country for their own ends. After Punjab and Assam, now it is the turn of Kashmir to demand a separate homeland. But has anyone paused to ask why these states are demanding secession from India? It is only because some people with vested interests would like to see India disintegrate. And Pakistan, will of course, love to see that happen.

**Ajit Baran Dutta, Murshidabad (West Bengal)**

■ The situation in Kashmir is only worsening with time. With Pakistan continuing to encourage the subversive activities, a war in the near future cannot be ruled out. Our neighbour is only interested in keeping the Kashmir problem alive to divert its people's attention from its own internal crisis and ethnic turmoil. To combat the terrorist activities in the state, the need of the hour is the installation of a democratic government in the state. Police and army action cannot be a permanent solu-

tion cannot afford to go against the wishes of the entire Opposition who want a war with India. This is the reason why Benazir has repeatedly changed her stand on Kashmir. What needs to be done now is to conduct a sustained anti-terrorist operation and stop the infiltration of militants from Pakistan. If the government has to persuade any one, it is the ordinary people of Kashmir. They must be made to understand that their future does not lie in Pakistan.

**Mithu Mukherjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

## Shirking responsibility

**W**ho is to be blamed for Rinku Patil's death (*Murder most foul*, 15-21 April)? While society will no doubt point an accusing finger at Harish Patel, her murderer, there are others to blame too. For instance, can the school authorities be allowed to go scot free for permitting the four hoodlums to enter the premises? Since an examination was on, wouldn't it have been more prudent on the part of the authorities to make security arrangements for the students? Rinku's parents too, cannot afford to say that they knew nothing about her relationship with Harish. If pa-

**Rinku Patil: unfortunate end**



rents are ignorant about their child's activities, it only reflects badly on them. Harish's father says that he was not aware of his son's friendship with the anti-social elements of the area. This is indeed very strange. It is time parents accepted their responsibilities towards their children.

**P N Banerji, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)**

## The rule of the Tau

**I**t is disgusting to find Prime Minister V P Singh bowing to the whims and fancies of the Tau.



**V.P. Singh (left) and Devi Lal: differences too many**

(*Devi Lal and sons Pvt Ltd* 18-24 March). Has the Janata Dal fought a relentless battle against the corruption of the Congress(I) only to find itself in a mess because of Devi Lal? It is obvious now that V P Singh is only functioning as a figurehead with Devi Lal and Om Prakash Chautala controlling the reins of power. Your magazine needs to be congratulated for unmasking the Tau.

**G.V. Prasad, Mangalore (Karnataka)**

■ Devi Lal is the Dhrit-rashtra of Indian politics. Even when he knows that his son Om Prakash Chautala (Duryodhan) is committing a mistake, the Tau maintains a discreet si-

tion to the problem. After all, it did not resolve the Punjab crisis even after six years.

**Nanda Dulal Roy Chowdhury, Kharagpur (West Bengal)**

■ The murder of three prominent civilians by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) militants once again proves that the Centre's policy on Kashmir is entirely wrong. The relatives of the dead can justifiably blame the government for the tragedy. After all, if six dreaded militants could be released in exchange for the home minister's daughter, why weren't the other militants released too? Instead of taking hard measures, the government only ends up sending an emissary of peace!

Benazir's stand on Kashmir is understandable. She obviously realises that she



lence. If the country is suffering at the hands of the father-son duo, it hardly matters, does it? Now that the serial *Mahabharata* is drawing to a close, viewers can while away their time watching the real life drama.

Kavita Menon, New Delhi

## The search continues

In *Jasmine*, as in all her novels, Bharati Mukherjee seems to be searching for her identity in the western world (*A death too many*, 15-21 April). This



point is amply illustrated by the main protagonist Jasmine who moves from place to place in her bid to settle down. Moreover the



**Bharati Mukherjee: identity crisis**

novel also indicates that Mukherjee has been influenced by American writers whose novels are replete with large doses of violence. *Harekrushna Mahanta, New Delhi*

## Setting the record straight

There was drastic misinformation in an early December issue regarding my film. I had lost my mother barely three weeks earlier and couldn't somehow summon the strength to write to you then. Again your 25-31 March issue (*Khaas Baat*) picks up on the diatribe.

For your information I owe no money to Doordarshan (DD). As per the rules I have paid all monies, as required by

Doordarshan in advance, and your statement to the contrary is therefore incorrect. The editing of my film was not done at DD (as you have wrongly alleged) but at Western Outdoor Studios in Bombay. This can be verified by them.

Please also verify with DD when they wrote to me asking me to produce documentaries on film personalities. (It was immediately after *Living Legend Raj Kapoor* and well before *India's Rajiv*.) Also, these were to be sponsored programmes, not financed by DD.

I cannot fathom the life of me lathom what you mean by "Mani Shankar Aiyar phase". It would have been laughable if it didn't smack of malicious intent.

As for luck, Raj Kapoor had been ailing for many years. He knew that he did not have long to live. We both had discussed this many times. The reason he agreed to do this film, despite his ill-health, was to put the record straight in some ways. The film was shown in London long before it was shown in India.

I made *India's Rajiv*. It was never telecast in India. Rajiv lost. If you give me the discredit for his losing—would you have given me the credit if he had won?

I suppose in a way you flatter me by attributing me powers over life and death and the winning and losing of elections!

Having been in the industry for over twenty years, one has learned to be a sport to some extent about the silly, cheap jibes that appear in the press from time to time. Being misquoted and misunderstood comes with the turf. When it is done in error, one can overlook it—but when the motive is to hurt and to damage my professional reputation because you have the power of the pen—it is not so easy to forgive.

*Simi Garewal, Bombay (Maharashtra);*



**Simi Garewal: indignant**

## In bad taste

I have some comments to make on your profile of Win Chadha (*Bluff and bluster*, 15-21 April). I think you have been extremely uncharitable to Punjabis in general. This is just not done, certainly not by a magazine of your stature.

Irrespective of what Win Chadha is or isn't, exceptions surely do not make the rule. By generalising all your barbs, insinuations, snide remarks and pure you have portrayed a successful Punjabi entrepreneur as someone who has come up in life only through short cuts. Nothing could be further from the truth. The enterprising streak in Punjab has helped them to rebuild their lives after the



**Win Chadha: under attack**

Partition, it has taken them all over the world. In many cases they are as successful (in the right sense) as any other Indian community. No doubt, there are black sheep among Punjabis—just as in any other community—but that does not make all of them bad. There are wheeler-dealers in all communities. Similarly, there are successful entrepreneurs, professionals and bureaucrats among them. Your remarks about a typical Punjabi—his clothes, personal habits, etc., are in bad taste. ● *Krishan Kalra, New Delhi*

## Under pressure

Can't the education department do anything to ease the burden on children (*The Indian role trick*, 18-24 March)? As it is the

child is under tremendous pressure at school, but matters are worsened when his parents make him attend coaching classes only because they feel that he can become the best.

*R. Panchapagesan, Madras (Tamil Nadu)*



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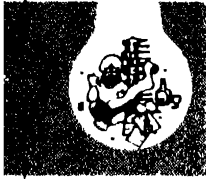
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KHUSHWANT SINGH

# Nonsense verse



The recent publication of *Indian Clerihews* by Emken (Writers Workshop) provides me an excuse to indulge in other forms of nonsensical verse including limericks which started being taken seriously in the 1860s when *Punch* began a regular column entitled *Fool Stuff*.

Much of the most popular form of nonsense verse is the limerick which the Dictionary defines as 'a facetious jangle'. The name limerick is derived from a parlour game popular in the early 19th century in which each member of the party was required to sing an extemporised "nonsense verse" followed by a chorus: "will you come up to Limerick?"

Although it is generally accepted that the founding father of the limerick was Edward Lear (1812-88) and perhaps the most widely reproduced limerick remains his:

There was an old man with a beard  
Who said "it is just as I feared,  
Two owls and a hen  
Four larks and a wren  
Have all built their nests in my beard!"

Lear's popularity was due to illustrations that he made himself and the wide variety of topics— he was a widely travelled man who also spent some time in India.

Limerick did not begin with Lear, he only gave it a distinct identity. "Hickory Dickory Dock, the mouse ran up the clock" is a much older version of the same genre. For reasons unknown limerick became the favourite form of bawdy writing. To wit:

The limerick form is complex  
Its contents run chiefly to sex  
It bargeons with virgeons  
And swarms with erotic effex  
Attempts to keep limericks clean  
were a failure. As Professor Bishop admitted:

The limerick is furtive and mean  
You must keep her in close quarantine  
Or she sneaks to the slums  
And promptly becomes  
Disorderly, drunk and obscene.  
Since sex is uppermost in most people's minds, it inevitably rears its

ugly head in verse

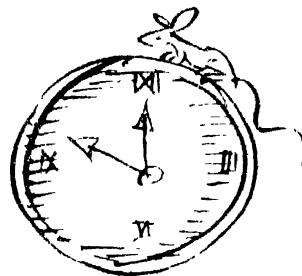
A well-known psychiatrist said  
We find sex to be all in the head  
Said his patient, "If true,  
will we hereafter screw  
In the library rather than in bed?"

Every political sexual scandal has produced a spate of limericks. Mrs Simpson, Magda Lupescu of Romania and Christine Keeler have been immortalised in limerick. I suspect that Pamela Bordes has eluded rhymed immortality because her name is not easy to rhyme. But limerick has kept pace with time. To wit:

When the race to the moon runs its course  
And women are sent there by force  
Will the men they embrace  
In the vast outer space  
Start to call making love "Outer course"?

This one is for the new tangled style of replacing Miss or Mrs with the two letter Ms.

Those women who call themselves Ms  
Assert the prerogative of HS  
Though clearly obsequious



**The name limerick is derived from a parlour game popular in the early 19th century in which each member of the party was required to sing an extemporised "nonsense rhyme" followed by a chorus "will you come up to limerick?"**

In matters quite devious

They still want to sit down to PS  
The clerihew is of later origin taking its name from the middle name of Edmund Clerihew Bentley (1875-1956). It is an epigrammatic verse form consisting of two rhymed couplets usually leading with a well-known person e.g.

Sir James Jeans  
Always says what he means  
He is really perfectly serious  
About the Universe being serious

Emken is the pen name of M.K. Naik, professor of English from Karnataka now with the University of Bombay. Most of his clerihews are on English poets.

John Milton  
Never stayed at the Hilton  
He was wise

He's booked in paradise

Those not familiar with literature will miss the *double entendre* in Emken's composition. Some however, can be comprehended by readers without a degree in English literature.

Socrates  
Was a great tease  
He declared hemlock  
Superior to wedlock  
And Sophocles  
Had a kidney disease  
He said "Call no man happy  
Till you learn how he pees"  
Bapu Gandhi and Nehru also appear in his collection.  
Mahatma Gandhi  
abhorred brandy  
But had no notion  
of the Murr p potion

~~~~~

## Lying champion

"People say you are the world's greatest liar," said an old hag to a man notorious for never telling the truth.

"I may be," replied the man. "But let me tell you there is another woman to match you in looks—*tharra jawanb nahin*."

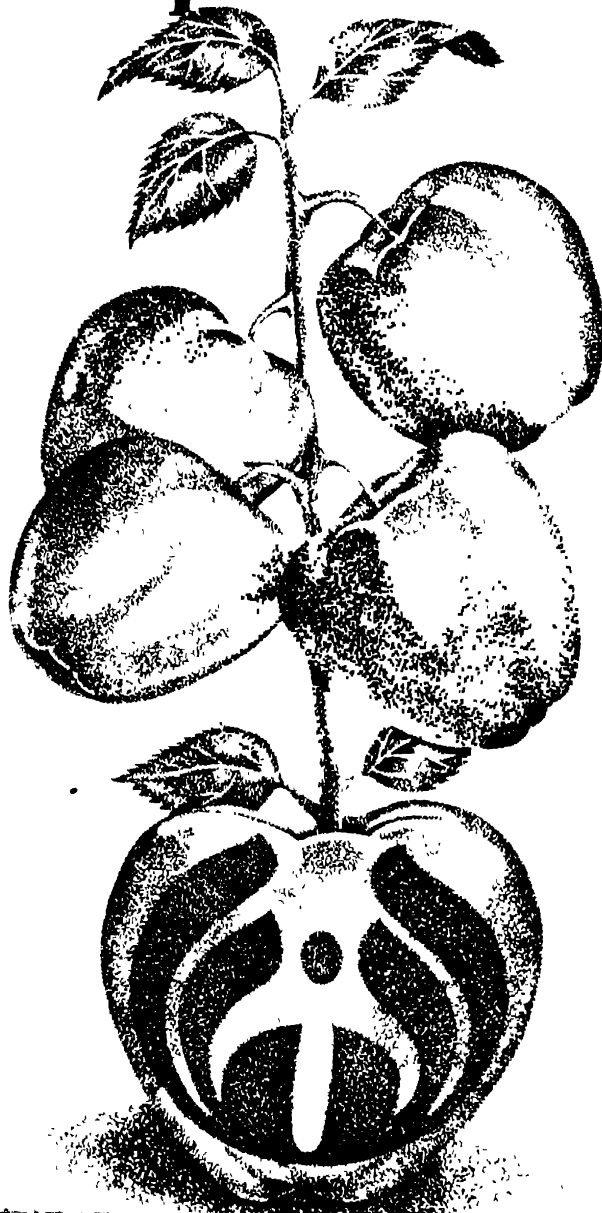
"How people can malign others!" said the hag. "They can make the most truthful person into a liar—*ek achhey khaasey admee ko badnaam kar key rakhi diya*."

(Contributed by Shashank Shekhar, Meerut) •



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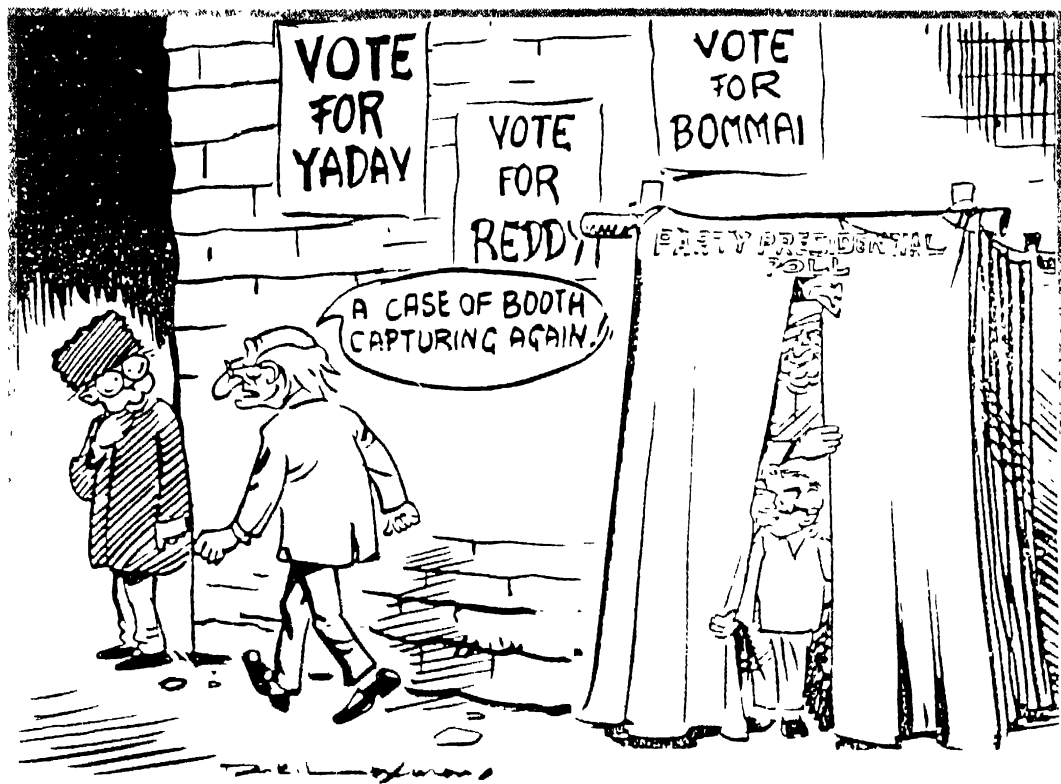


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■ I do not think our approaches are different. It could only be a difference in emphasis.

**GEORGE FERNANDES**, Union railways minister, on whether he had differences with J&K Governor Jagmohan and Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed on Kashmir

■ Nationalisation of sick units is nothing but hospitalisation. Some people want nationalisation of losses and privatisation of profits.

**MADHU DANDAVATE**, Union finance minister, ruling out nationalisation of sick mills

■ The Prime Minister says a national consensus is first on Kashmir. The nation is ready; it has made up its mind. Is the government in Delhi prepared to act or not?

The time for speeches is over.

**SHANTA KUMAR**, Himachal Pradesh chief minister

■ Are we not concerned about Madhya Pradesh? Why does Baba Amte believe that the interest of the state is dearer to him than to us?

**SUNDERLAL PATWA**, Madhya Pradesh chief minister, on Baba Amte's role in the agitation against the Narmada Sagar dam

■ The economic burden on West Bengal is Rs 180 crores a month... they get ration cards you know. Think what you can do without this burden.

**MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI**, BJP general secretary, on the number of Bangladeshi refugees in West Bengal

■ Public service advertising can change

the world your children and my children will inherit.

**ALYQUE PADAMSEE**, chief executive, Lintas (India)

■ When I came to the environment ministry, it didn't exist, except on paper. It was a grey area ministry. Nobody really cared. Now it is a ministry that genuinely does care and is not scared to do so.

**MANEKA GANDHI**, minister of state for environment



■ If the AGP is silent about ULFA, so are other political parties in the state.

**PRAFULLA MAHANTA**, chief minister of Assam

■ I want people to judge the policies being followed by my government.

**OM PRAKASH CHAUTALA**, chief minister of Haryana, on why he was contesting from two constituencies



# Sarkari Shankaracharya

*Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati ranks high in the hierarchy of Congress holy men*



*The Times of India* edits are not over renowned for spreading enlightenment or clarity; not surprising in a paper which has made "but on the other hand" an essential

element of editorial writing. However, on 28 April, the first editorial of *The Times* fairly bristled with barely containable anger. It accused a certain political party of "direct complicity in provocative adventurism", of "utter travesty and complete abandonment of political principles", of "irresponsible manipulations and pandering to the worst elements of Hindu and Muslim communalism", of "discreetly instructing its members to prop up pathetic fanaticism", of "mortgaging its entire tradition to unprincipled expediency". Strong stuff.

Which party? Surely, not the one led by Shri Rajiv Gandhi? Wonders never cease. Yes, *The Times* was directing its fire-power at the links between the Congress and the proposed second *shilanyas* in Ayodhya by Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth and Jyotipeeth. Currently, the Jagatguru (guru of the universe) is enjoying the confined hospitality of the UP government, but in the past few weeks he has been hogging the headlines and altogether wasting too many trees.

Before we examine the many "links" it may be useful to remind ourselves what the meddlesome priest was planning to do on 7 May. Claiming that the earlier *shilanyas* by the VHP was a fraud— "wrong, mispious time, at the wrong site and in violation of the *shastras*"—the Jagatguru, uninvited, embarked on a correcting exercise. Armed with four bricks, "Nanda", "Bhadra", "Jaya", and "Parna", the Swami chalked out a fresh foundation stone-laying ceremony, not 192 feet away from the mosque, but in the heart of the Babri Masjid: in other words, in the heart of

what is officially "disputed property". He would not stop there. Immediately after the *shilanyas*, construction of the temple would begin in earnest.

The consequences of such an act, if allowed, are too horrendous to contemplate. Even the Swami's past record of irresponsibility and recklessness are insufficient grounds to explain why such calculated provocation was planned at such a critical juncture, especially when in four weeks the government is pledged to come up with a formula to resolve the dispute.

**M**ercifully, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) quickly distanced itself from the second *shilanyas* and has made only token protests when its author was arrested. The only protests, besides those from Swaroopanand supporters, came from the

Congress. The parliamentary party secretary, P.N. Sukul, said in the House that the arrest was "avoidable" and criticised the government for not opening a dialogue with the Swami—without bothering to explain what kind of dialogue can be opened with a maverick determined on dangerous mischief.

Actually, Mr Sukul had no option but to defend Swaroopanand, who for all practical purposes is a "card-carrying" Congress Swami. Successive Prime Ministers and senior leaders have paid obeisance to him and, while in the pantheon of all-India holy men the Swami may occupy a lowly place, he ranks very high in the hierarchy of Congress holy men. Indeed, so close and long-established are his links that he is popularly known as "sarkari Shankaracharya".

**Swami Swaroopanand (right): serving god and the state**





In Madhya Pradesh, the headquarters of his earthly kingdom, the Shankaracharya's clout is legendary. In Jabalpur, Narsinghpur, Seoni and Chindwara districts, no candidate can get a ticket unless he has the Jagatguru's approval and blessings. It is common knowledge, for instance, that the single Rajya Sabha seat in the biennial elections was given to one Suresh Pachauri, against the wishes of the state unit, because Pachauri was in acolyte of the Swami.

In between serving god and the state, the Swami finds time to sponsor lotteries and appears in advertisements to promote their sales. (The fact that the lotteries fail to distribute any prizes is a small matter.) But even here politics intrude. The lotteries are usually promoted by Congress legislators or those who are related to them. He has also been having an interesting battle with a rival swami over ownership of a "cave" in which Ach Shankaracharya allegedly meditated. Altogether, then, our Shankaracharya is an extraordinarily colourful character, entirely in tune with the line of godmen the Congress party patronises.

**A**lthough the Congress' association with the seer of Dwarka goes back at least 15 years, it is only since 1986, when the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute resurfaced, that the party began assiduously building him up. Given Swaroopanand's hostility to the VHP and the BJP—a hostility based on the fact that he was given short shrift by both organisations—Buta Singh thought it useful to create dissensions and divisions within the VHP-led Hindu revivalist movement. The ploy failed largely because the Congress Jagatguru was a marginal swami, one who did not have a significant following. Additionally, the seer's rhetoric was too harsh for even Ashok Singhal's ears. Mrs Vijayaraje Scindia is not given to attacking Hindu holy men in public. However, in the case of Swaroopanand she made an exception by calling frivolous and

## The Swami chalked out a fresh foundation stone-laying ceremony, not 192 feet away from the mosque, but in the heart of the "disputed property"—the Babri Masjid

flippant. The Dwarka Swami's only ideological companion is the equally obscurantist Jagatguru of Puri. Together they make a lonely pair.

Having failed to sow fratricidal war within the VHP, the Congress had set great store on the Parishad making trouble for V.P. Singh just before the Assembly polls. The expectation was that the Janata Dal, which had reaped the rewards of Rajiv Gandhi's discomfiture on the Ayodhya issue, would now be at the receiving end of the Hindu militant's ire. Miraculously, the VHP granted the Prime Minister a four-month reprieve. The Assembly elections were lost.

Now, as the day (8 June) approaches, the VHP while making all the right noises, has already toned down its stridency and is talking about a scenario in which it might extend the reprieve. Admittedly, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir would have to deteriorate even further for another extension to be granted, but it is interesting that senior leaders like Ashok Singhal and Mahant Avaidyanath are openly discussing the possibility.

The BJP, meanwhile, hardly utters an encouraging word on the building of the Ram Temple: all its energies these days are directed towards destroying Article 370 and terrorist bases in POK. In short, the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute has been put on the back burner. Clearly, Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani have concluded that there is more electoral mileage in going after Pakistan and the JKLF than an illusory temple at Ayodhya.

In the circumstances, it would not be overly rash to presume that come 8 June the BJP will be less than helpful to the VHP. Indeed, it might even put pressure on its ally to discreetly find an escape route while publicly going through the motions of *morchas*, ulti-

matums and fasts. In the two or three conversations I have had with Janata Dal leaders about future headaches, not one mentioned Babri Masjid. I don't believe they were being just complacent.

**C**onfronted with this new scenario, the Congress must have panicked. How could it lose the one issue on which it had pinned its hopes to return to power? Messrs Rajiv Gandhi and Buta Singh, past masters at playing the Hindu card, dusted up Swaroopanand and encouraged him to announce the second *shilanyas* in the hope of rekindling the dispute and simultaneously issued a warning to the VHP that if it wavered in its commitment, there were others to continue the crusade.

There is, of course, no smoking gun to prove Congress complicity. No tape-recording of a dialogue between the Jagatguru and Buta Singh has yet been published in the *Indian Express*. Nor is such a scoop likely. However, ever since the Dwarka Swami announced his private *shilanyas*, Mr Rajiv Gandhi's men have been behaving very strangely indeed.

First of all, it is inconceivable that the *sarkari* Shankaracharya would have attempted so audacious and ambitious an enterprise without the blessings of Rajiv Gandhi. Secondly, in the past few weeks hardly a word has been spoken inside or outside Parliament by the Congress, denouncing the second *shilanyas*. It was with enormous reluctance that the Congress general secretary, H.K.L. Bhagat, got around to disassociating his party from the 7 May mischief. The Congress is overflowing with MPs who lose no opportunity to preach to the nation the precept and practice of secularism. They can get almost hysterical in defence of minority rights and minority sensitivities. Where are they now? Why do we, and why did we, not hear even the mildest criticism of Swaroopanand? All we hear is a deafening silence.

It must have taken great courage on the part of this government to put the Dwarka seer under house arrest. It was an exemplary act, at once politically and morally wise. The Muslims of this country must be particularly relieved that communal mischief has been nipped in the bud. And Congress hypocrisy has been exposed once again. All of which from this writer's point of view is good news. •





# Diplomatic drift

*A balance-sheet of the V.P. Singh regime's foreign policy*



Between 1986 and 1989 I met Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze a dozen or more times. He was such a refreshing change from the dour and taciturn Andrei

Gromyko. When I got to know Mr Shevardnadze well, I asked him one day if he had heard the latest *glasnost* joke about him. He was cautiously curious, not quite sure what to expect. He said he had not heard it before. He could not have heard it because I had invented it. Shevardnadze does not speak or understand English and translating humour is a perilous task for any interpreter. But the Soviet foreign minister's interpreter is out of this world. He got the translation right and made my day. Here's the joke:

There was a press conference in Moscow at which an American correspondent asked Mr Shevardnadze how many people work in the Soviet foreign ministry. The Soviet foreign minister answered with a straight face, "About half." Mr Shevardnadze waited for the translation and then burst out laughing. He later told me he had repeated it to Mr Gorbachev, who, too, had a good laugh.

Now let me get to the point. In New Delhi we have over a hundred diplomatic missions. If I were asked, "How many do serious work?" my answer would be, "About half."

One of the main tasks of an ambassador is to keep his government fully informed of developments taking place in the country to which he is accredited. India, by any standards, is a major country. When an election produces the results ours did in November 1989, the coded telegraphic traffic increases manifold. The embassies and high commissions have now to compete with the BBC, the Voice Of America (VOA), Radio Moscow, and Beijing and Tokyo and Karachi. The 'serious' embassies must be finding analysing the present government's foreign policy somewhat bewildering.

Having spent my entire adult life understanding, explaining, articulating and finally formulating foreign policy, I am familiar with the perils and hazards of diplomatic reporting. Diplomats cannot become prophets but they are expected to anticipate crises and accordingly, advise their government. The important thing is not to be found out. So the language

dazed state of high and permanent confusion. While 150 days is too short a period to arrive at definite conclusions about the foreign policy of the National Front government, some preliminary deductions can be made.

**F**irst, there is no foreign policy. There is a foreign minister and a foreign office but policy is not visible.



**I.K. Gujra with the leader of the visiting Nepalese delegation: the government of**

of diplomatic communications, has, over the centuries, evolved a delightful flavour of its own—no emphatic or unqualified recommendations, no definite conclusions, a calculated ambiguity and avoidance of idiom, except "on the one hand, but on the other". If an ambassador goes wrong, then the retribution is merciless.

Hence I do not envy the heads of missions in Delhi. They must be in a

To have a meaningful and effective foreign policy, a government must have, broadly speaking, a common and shared point of view. This obviously the present government does not have. It cannot. The left goes right and the right goes left. The BJP has one point of view, the communist parties another. The Prime Minister says that the country should be psychologically prepared for war and



his foreign minister says he does not want to hear the word "war". The Prime Minister says that unless Pakistan stops its unacceptable activities in Kashmir and Punjab, there can be no talks with Pakistan. Next week his foreign minister meets his Pakistani colleague in New York (How the Gujral-Yakub talks were arranged is another story and does little credit to India) So what do diplomats in Delhi report? Temporary confusion, likely to continue.

Between January 1980 and November 1989, no one in Pakistan dared adopt the postures and language they are now adopting and using. Why? They can, because there is no internal

**There is a foreign minister and foreign office, but no foreign policy. To have a meaningful and effective policy the government must have a common point of view, which the present government lacks**



**Nepal fell even before the talks began**

coherence and that is reflected in the conduct of foreign policy

When this government came into office it proclaimed that it would improve relations with India's neighbours and not "act as a bully" and abandon the "coercive" policy followed by Rajiv Gandhi.

What has it achieved? What is its record? Let us calmly examine Relations with Pakistan have taken a

nosedive and tensions have risen. There is talk of war (not likely, because Russia and America will not allow it). Kashmir has been made an international diplomatic football. All this within 150 days. And the final outcome is nowhere in sight.

On his return from the Maldives, the foreign minister of India makes an astounding pronouncement that under no circumstances will Indian military forces be sent out of India. What about our solemn treaty obligations? What will this government do if the Maldives or Bhutan asks for military help? Do we apply the absurd Gujral doctrine, or do we not? Some clarification is needed. None has so far been offered. Even Inder Malhotra, cool-headed and cautious, has raised the matter and he, too, is awaiting a response.

Nepal. The Prime Minister of Nepal has publicly stated that but for the pressures put on Nepal last year, the movement for democracy would not have got off the ground. And which government in its senses would have sent its seniormost officials for discussing Indo-Nepal relations when the Nepalese ruling establishment was falling apart in slow motion before our eyes? Hardly had that delegation reached Delhi when the government of Nepal fell. Some management of foreign affairs

Sri Lanka. Mr Karunanidhi and the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are calling the shots, not South Block. The treaty of friendship which the Rajiv Gandhi government was willing to sign is yet to be signed. And the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987 remains the only long-term guarantee to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

Kampuchea. We were among the most active and respected participants in the exercise. We arranged the first ever meeting between Prince Sihanouk and the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Now India is not even mentioned in connection with Kampuchea.

Afghanistan. Rajiv Gandhi was right on Najibullah and his government and we were active on Afghanistan. Now, you know.

Southern Africa. When Nelson Mandela, after his release, was welcomed in Lusaka, the countries invited to join the welcome were the frontline states, Nigeria, Australia and Canada. Not India. Why?

In his address to the nation on taking over as Prime Minister, Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singhji said his government would strengthen the Non-Aligned Movement.

The adamantine fact is that today we are not even mentioned in the movement. The movement needs to be revitalised and India was one country that could do so. But alas, that is not the case.

The joke doing the rounds in South Block is that this government is very innovative. For 43 years we had high commissions in London accredited to Whitehall, now we have one accredited to Southall.

Professional diplomats will, of course, be reporting this directional drift to their governments and enjoying themselves reading the pronouncements of the deputy prime minister (the Haryana political bull who carries his own china shop with him) that 50 per cent of the Indian ambassadors should come from village India. Preferably Meham!

For 43 years we have had a broad consensus on foreign policy. Nothing should be done by this government to destroy it. As Mr Rajiv Gandhi said, we in the Congress will give constructive support. Let's see what the next 150 days have in store. The diplomatic corps in Delhi and the world watch with diminishing interest. •



# UNDER FIRE

*With terrorist attacks on the rise, Delhi becomes India's most vulnerable city*

- Between 7 January and 30 April, more than 16 people were killed and 106 wounded in powerful bomb explosions in buses and marketplaces in Delhi

- Placing bags on the floors of buses has been banned; commuters are advised to carry their possessions on their laps and look under their seats for suspicious objects

- Since January 1990, fires have devastated seven slums, the country's premier official conference hall, the records rooms of two official buildings and a crowded market in the capital, resulting in the death of seven people

And in crowded places. On buses that carry passengers to the city's vast resettlement colonies, at railway stations, the inter state bus terminus (ISBT), inside cinema halls and markets. Says Air Marshal (Retd) Anjan Singh, the city's lieutenant governor, "Delhi is a very big city and the only way we can fight this menace is by getting at the source—the terrorists themselves."

While the police and the intelligence are busy tracking down terrorist

gangs, Delhi must bear the brunt of their attacks. On 7 January, 1990, a bomb went off near the red stone boundary wall of Parliament House. Two people were killed in a bomb blast at Mandlaoli a week later. On 19 March, a blast at the Azadpur market killed one person and injured 17. On 10 April, explosions rocked the Tilak Nagar and Rajouri Garden police stations, injuring 11, and three days later, six people died and 40 were hurt in this year's worst bomb blast in a crowded bus at Azadpur. In end-April,

another explosion in a bus near Pitampura killed four and injured 30, and yet another at the Khanpur bus terminal left three, including a policeman, dead and eight wounded.

"The bombs they are using are very powerful," says Delhi's deputy commissioner of police (crime), Amodh Kanth. He recalls an explosive object the Crime Branch had detected in Old Delhi sometime ago, which, if it had gone off, would have had the effect of a napalm bomb. "It would have burnt up everything around." The bomb, he says, weighed 45 kg. "It had 40 kg of petrojelly, in which the explosive was kept. In the explosive was a detonator and the device." He adds, "If it had exploded, it would have probably been the worst incident to date."

The New Delhi railway station bomb blast in 1987, when human flesh and pieces of luggage were found several

**The spot where the bomb went off at New Delhi railway station: terrorists strike**



**T**oday, Delhi is probably India's most vulnerable and insecure city, with gangs of terrorists on the prowl.

For a population of 62 lakhs that depends mostly on a heavily-subsidised bus service, live in congested colonies and works in crowded markets and office complexes, precautions against terrorist strikes are near-impossible. Even a full-throated media campaign exhorting people to look under their seats for suspicious objects and surprise checks on buses have not made commuting any safer. As Vijay Kumar Malhotra, the BJP MP from Sadar Bazar, says, "The terrorist is trained to strike when you're off guard."





**Vehicles damaged in a bomb explosion in north-west Delhi: Pakistani hand?; and Lt Governor of Delhi, Arjan Singh: fighting the menace**

metres away from the point of the explosion demonstrated how powerful the device is. "Now," says Kanth, "they are using a substance called cyclotrimethylene or RDX to make bombs." The police believe this is the substance which was used in the bombs which exploded on the Chhatrisgarh Express and at a place near Ahmedabad. RDX is probably smuggled into India from Pakistan, they say.

**T**errorist strikes in Delhi have become common over the last eight years. "A bomb attack in Delhi makes national headlines, while a blast in a smaller town in Punjab gets lost in the third or fourth page," says Kanth. But he is happy the police have been able to solve most of the blast cases since 1982.

In 1982-83, Sarvjit Singh and Mithu Bains Singh were arrested in connection with the bomb explosion at ISBT. In 1985 - in the months following the November 1984 anti-Sikh riots - the transistor bomb blasts claimed 85 lives and left 150 injured, not only in Delhi but in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. "That was the single biggest terrorist strike in the city," Kanth says. It has been unsurpassed in intensity till date.

Next came the blasts of 10 and 11 May, 1985. Those involved were

Mahinder Singh Oberoi, Mahinder Singh Khalsa, Kartar Singh Natang and Sukhdev Singh Khalsa, the head of the Babbar Khalsa. Some 54 persons were arrested, while eight offenders absconded.

After 1985, there were no terrorist strikes for a period of three years. Then, a bomb went off at the Shahdara bus terminus, killing three and injuring 27. The man behind this was Atinder Pal Singh. The police found a number of bombs concealed in two-kg edible oil tins in Paharganj, Delhi Cantonment and other places. The New Delhi railway station blast occurred on 12 June, 1989. Ten people died and 50 were injured. A sub-inspector of police, Beart Singh, was arrested.

The men responsible for the latest round of blasts in Delhi are a dismissed police constable, Gurjasbir Singh, Mangal Singh of Gurdaspur, who belongs to the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTFK), and a man called 'Doctor', who also belongs to the BTFK. A reward of Rs 25,000 each has been announced for the capture of Gurjasbir and Mangal Singh - dead or alive. Gurjasbir has been bitter since the November 1984 riots in Delhi in which his girlfriend, Jeeta, was killed. Says Kanth, "His case is typical of all dismissed policemen and others who have been engaging in such activities." Bitter and angry, they are determined

to avenge their losses.

Vijay Kumar Malhotra of the BTP feels that the information gathered by intelligence agencies on disgruntled policemen and mutineers is totally inadequate. Once a person in uniform has been dismissed for indulging in subversive activities, a strict watch should be kept on him, says the BTP leader. However, the government often doesn't have a clue about such a person's whereabouts. As for the recent explosions, Malhotra sees a pattern in them. They have been happening in places which saw killings during the November 1984 riots, he says, such as Kalkaji, Tolak Nagar and Rajouri Garden.

Talking of mutineers, some of them continue to be in a position to sabotage important buildings. The mutineers were supposed to have been rehabilitated in less strategic jobs. But some of them have been absorbed in the Defence Security Corps (DSC), which is in charge of guarding defence establishments, including the army headquarters. Among them are trainees who were alleged to have joined the revolt against their units after Operation Blue Star. The government inducted them into the DSC because it found no clear evidence against them. But defence sources believe they could easily cause trouble if they wished to. Illiteracy is another problem: many of the DSC guards just



cannot tell a fake entry permit from a genuine one. They allow anyone who says he is from a cooking gas agency or fire brigade to enter the premises, without properly checking his credentials

**W**ho is behind the fires that have been breaking out in important buildings and crowded markets in Delhi? The BJP's V K Malhotra does

## The men behind the blasts

*Punjab's extremists and their activities in Delhi*

**D**elhi first became a target for Punjab's killer gangs in the early Eighties. But the attacks became more frequent after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984.

Harjinder Singh Jinda operated



**Atinder Pal Singh**

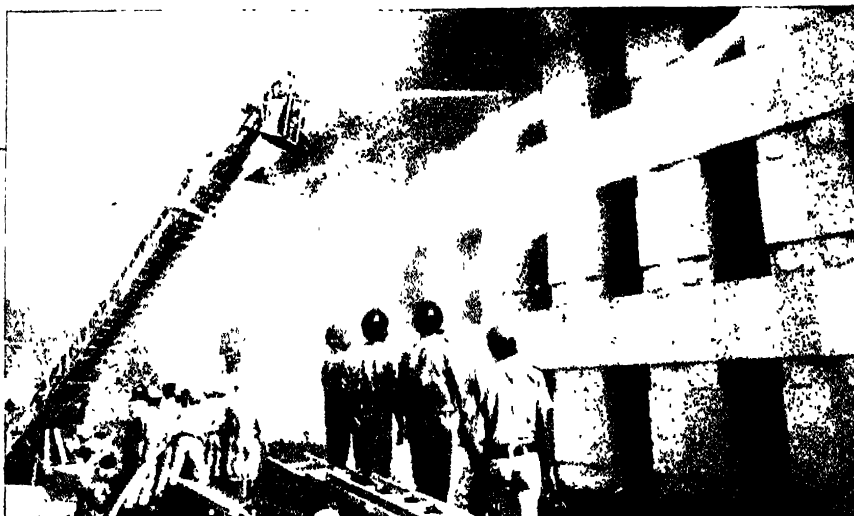
**Harjinder Singh Jinda**

through two separate gangs. The first was the Inderpal Singh Sangal-Harpal Singh group, which carried out five bank dacoities in Delhi in 1984-85. The second was the Billoo-Babla gang of Punjab, which robbed a jewellery shop in Karol Bagh and attempted three other robberies.

The police managed to track down the culprits, but not the man behind them, Jinda himself, who joined the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF). Jinda took up residence in NOIDA, near Delhi, and was eventually caught by the police. But when he was being taken to a court in Ahmedabad in 1986, he escaped. He was caught and imprisoned again in 1987. Jin-

not rule out the hand of saboteurs "But the main reason for fires in the slums," he says, "is that some of the new slum dwellers want land in exchange for their huts." The government, by way of relief, gives 25 sq

yards to each family that loses its hut in a slum fire. The DCP (crime), Amodh Kanth, shares this view, but rules out the possibility of sabotage in any of the fires that have broken out till now.



**Vigyan Bhavan burns: fires wreak havoc in Delhi**

da is now awaiting execution in a Pune jail.

The other notorious terrorist active in Delhi was Surjit Singh Penta of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTFK). His gang was responsible for the cold-blooded killings of 1987, when a group of youths on two-wheelers opened fire on *puja* revellers in Chittaranjan Park and on a birthday party in Greater Kailash. They also killed BJP councillor Harbhajan Seth and his brother, Mulchand.

The police blame Atinder Pal Singh, a dismissed policeman and now member of Parliament whom the government has refused to release, for the bomb blast in Shahdara in 1988. Nishan Singh and Dalbir Singh were behind the explosion in New Delhi railway station in June 1989, which left ten dead and 50 injured. The police claim to have solved all these cases.

The men they are on the lookout for in connection with the bus blasts in 1990 are Gurjasbir Singh, a young constable who was dismissed from the Delhi police, Mangal Singh of Gurdaspur, who works for the BTFK, and a terrorist with a curious alias, 'Doctor'. The only arrest the police have made so far is Beant Singh, another disgruntled policeman out to avenge a loss he suffered in 1984.

But as for the recent bomb blasts, the government suspects Pakistani involvement. The material used to make the bombs is unlikely to have been acquired from Indian ordnance factories, officials say, and has probably been smuggled in. No worthwhile clues—from a forensic point of view—have been obtained from the sites of the five recent blasts. The devices were carefully timed. But there was no trace of a timer. The police believe light quartz timers were used and the intensity of the blasts destroyed them. The ballistic velocity of these blasts was found to be 1,000 metres a second.

But despite the many blasts in the capital, the authorities remain undaunted. Delhi's plan for an underground railway system to ease traffic congestion remains unaffected by the spells of terror. When they first announced it, Delhi administration officials did acknowledge the fact that a tube railway network in Delhi would probably be the 'softest' terrorist target in the city. It would enable saboteurs to inflict maximum damage with minimum effort. But this didn't deter the plans for the project.

Even DCP Amodh Kant is confident that with public vigil, the menace can be checked. Is the authorities' confidence misplaced or will they be able to make Delhi a safe city once again? Only time will tell. •

**Nirmal Mitra/ New Delhi**



# Farewell, Phizo

*The legendary Naga leader dies in England*

**H**e had long ceased to be of any consequence to his tribesmen, but when Angami Zapu Phizo passed away on 1 May in London, it marked the end of a significant phase in the history of the Naga struggle for independence. During the last few years, Phizo lived a lonely life, far away from the battlefield of his youth. Age and a debilitating disease had rendered him paralytic. And the feeling that he had failed his people smothered whatever fire was left in the undisputed leader of the Nagas for more than four decades.

Phizo arrived in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, long before Independence, and set up a tyre workshop. But the British rulers were irked by his anti-colonial stance and drove him out

of his place. That was the first provocation and Phizo took a vow to liberate his people from any sort of slavery. Hounded by the British, Phizo fled India and found a job at the Rangoon docks in Burma. Phizo later claimed that he collaborated with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA) on the condition that once India became free, the Nagas too would be granted independence.

But that was not to be and in 1950, Phizo took over as chairman of the Naga National Council, with the aim of carrying on the struggle for Naga independence. Years in jail had already made him a hero with his people. And in 1952, the Nagas formally objected to the merger of Nagaland with the Union of India by boycotting the general elections that year.

In 1956, the Naga National Council launched an all-out offensive against the Indian administration. New Delhi responded by deploying the army in Nagaland and brought it under the Disturbed Areas

Act. But the intensity with which the Nagas fought demonstrated how good an organiser Phizo was. In 1958, Phizo fled to Pakistan to arrange for aid, which was soon forthcoming.

It was around this time that Phizo felt that the Naga issue should be raised in different international fora. He visited London in 1960, and followed it up with a brief stopover at the United Nations headquarters in New York but failed to elicit a favourable response from them.

In fact, observers feel that Phizo made a blunder by spending more time abroad trying to internationalise the Naga problem. For, long periods of absence from Nagaland cut him off from the people. The result was that a younger breed of Naga guerrillas soon

took over the reins of the movement. And inevitably, personality clashes split the Naga National Council into warring groups.

Phizo, who could have acted as a catalyst to unite all the Naga factions, chose to stay in London during this crucial phase. The Indian government utilised the opportunity to crush Naga insurgency and as the army gained control, Phizo faded into oblivion. The Shillong Accord was signed in 1975, which dealt a blow to the Naga movement. And a Phizo in exile could do no more than issue statements condemning the atrocities on the Nagas.

The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed in 1981 by pro-Beijing Naga leaders like Muivah and Issac Swu, both of whom

denounced Phizo and his "clique of reactionary stooges". And since the early Eighties, it is the NSCN which has been at the centre-stage of the Naga freedom struggle.

But the desire to liberate the Nagas was still there in Phizo. In the mid-Eighties, he made one more attempt to unite the different Naga rebel outfits through two of his former generals—Thinohelie and Mowu Angami. But the effort failed and Mowu slipped out of the country to join Phizo in Britain.

In his last days, Phizo tried to keep the heat on by linking up with other anti-India groups in Britain—the Khalistanis and the Kashmiri separatists in particular. But as Jagjit Singh Chouhan, the self-proclaimed chairman of the Khalistan National Council, said: "His age has been against him. He also does not have regular contact with those who are still fighting against the Indian Army. Otherwise, he could have been a useful ally."

**Subir Bhaumik**

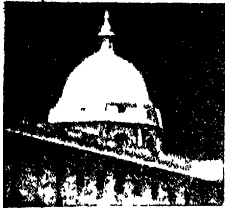
(From our files) Phizo with his daughter in Britain: end of an era





# The widening gulf

*Indo-US relations sour over the Super 301 issue*



There must be some kind of a hoodoo over relations between the world's largest and most powerful democracies. All the claptrap about "common commitment" to democratic values has never prevented bickerings between India and the United States. Some perceptive and unhappy observers of the scene have indeed written about the "widening gulf" separating the two countries.

Time was when the US, busy in a crusade to "roll back the tidal wave of communism", found India's non-alignment irritating, unacceptable and even "immoral". In pursuance of its perceived global and regional objectives, America did not hesitate to adopt policies directly detrimental to Indian security and supreme interests even while giving India massive economic aid. To most Indians Dullesian "pactomania" used to be like the red rag to the bull, there are many Americans around who to this day claim to have been "irked deeply" by Krishna Menon's stentorian sermonising. Even as late as 1971, there was the notorious Nixon-Kissinger "tilt" towards Yahya Khan's murderous regime in Pakistan. Unabashedly, the US supported in the Bangladesh war the side that was morally in the wrong and militarily doomed to lose.

Despite the renewed US-Pakistan military relationship, in the wake of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, a slow but subtle change started taking place in Indo-US relations in the early Eighties. Here Indira Gandhi had returned to power after only a three-year political exile, while in the US the Leflon presidency of Ronald Reagan had begun. The shared approach of the two sides was that while irreconcilable differences between them should be bypassed, all-out efforts should be made in other areas to promote understanding and cooperation.

It was during Rajiv Gandhi's time

that the new approach flowered. India, wanting to profit from America's overwhelming technological superiority, sought the state-of-art dual technology from the US. The Americans, having developed respect for India's military power and economic potential, especially with an eye to the expanding and potentially vast Indian market, became responsive. Indeed, they began to entertain hopes that, by providing India with some military technology, they could some day wean it away from the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of the year, which ushered in the new decade and the new government in New Delhi, things looked up even more dramatically. On the vital and emotive issue of Kashmir, the US, for the first time in 40 years, refused to offer comfort to Pakistan. Instead, it endeared itself to India by giving the outdated UN resolutions on Kashmir and the talk of plebiscite a wide berth and concentrating instead on the Shimla Agreement. It asked India and Pakistan to avoid war and to settle all disputes and differences, including Kashmir, in the spirit of the accord signed at Shimla over 17 years ago by Benazir's father and Rajiv's mother.

Against this encouraging backdrop, it is all the more shocking that on a range of trade issues, covered by the ugly rubric "Super 301", the US has

**V.P. Singh: the ball is in his court**



chosen to treat India in a manner which is overbearing, offensive, petty and mean. Seeds of renewed bitterness and discord have been sown.

"Super 301" is perhaps the worst section of the omnibus US trade law which is highly protectionist. It was enacted in 1988 specifically to retaliate against Japan which had built up a whopping 50 billion dollar trade surplus against the US. But India's trade surplus of 850 million dollars is so inconsequential as to be laughable. Indeed, the whole Indo-US trade of less than six billion dollars is chickenfeed in American terms though it is vital for India.

Last year, the US notified that Japan, Brazil and India were following "unfair trade practices" which ought to change within a year or else America would take "retaliatory action". At the end of this period, Japan and Brazil have been quietly let off the hook and India has been singled out as the only "culprit" in the wide world.

Some are bound to argue that Japan and Brazil have tried to be "accommodative" to American concerns while India has refused to discuss the issue bilaterally "under threat". Its preference is for multilateral negotiations without duress. However, the truth of the matter is that Japan's trade surplus has actually increased during the last 12 months. The angry US action against India is like a man unable to face a burly bully beating up a weak and innocent bystander.

V.P. Singh's government is committed, as firmly as that of Rajiv Gandhi, not to budge from its present position. America, which has set itself up as the sole arbiter of unfair trade practices, despite its own glaring transgressions of the doctrine of free trade, is bound by its law to take "retaliatory action" unless it gets some satisfaction from India by 16 June.

Unless Washington withdraws from the brink even at this late stage, a souring of India-America relations appears unavoidable. What a waste of the decade-long efforts to improve them! •



# WAR AND PEACE

*Twenty-eight years after the battle for Goa, India and Portugal initiate friendship moves*

**W**hen the Portuguese dictator Dr Oliveira Salazar refused to vacate Goa even 14 years after Indian Independence and in a show of belligerence ordered his frigates to shell Indian vessels straying near Goan territorial waters, Jawaharlal Nehru decided it was a bit too much. On the morning of 18 December, 1961, the Indian Navy blockaded the harbours of Goa, the Air Force bombed the local airfield and the Indian Army's 17th Division led by Major General K.P. Candeth started marching towards Goa's capital, Panjim. Desperate Portuguese forces tried to stall the Indian advance by blowing up bridges and culverts. But by next morning, Indian troops were swarming into Panjim. The Portuguese defenders, instead of putting up a fight, assembled outside their officers' mess and waited for the Indian troops. Before noon on 19 December, 1961, the Indian tricolour was fluttering atop the Goa Governor's palace, marking the end of 450 years of Portuguese colonial rule in India.

For all practical purposes, however, Portugal and India remained at loggerheads for another 13 years. Salazar declared that they might have lost the battle of Goa but the war was not yet over. He never stopped insisting that Goa was an integral part of Portugal and continued to nominate two Goan

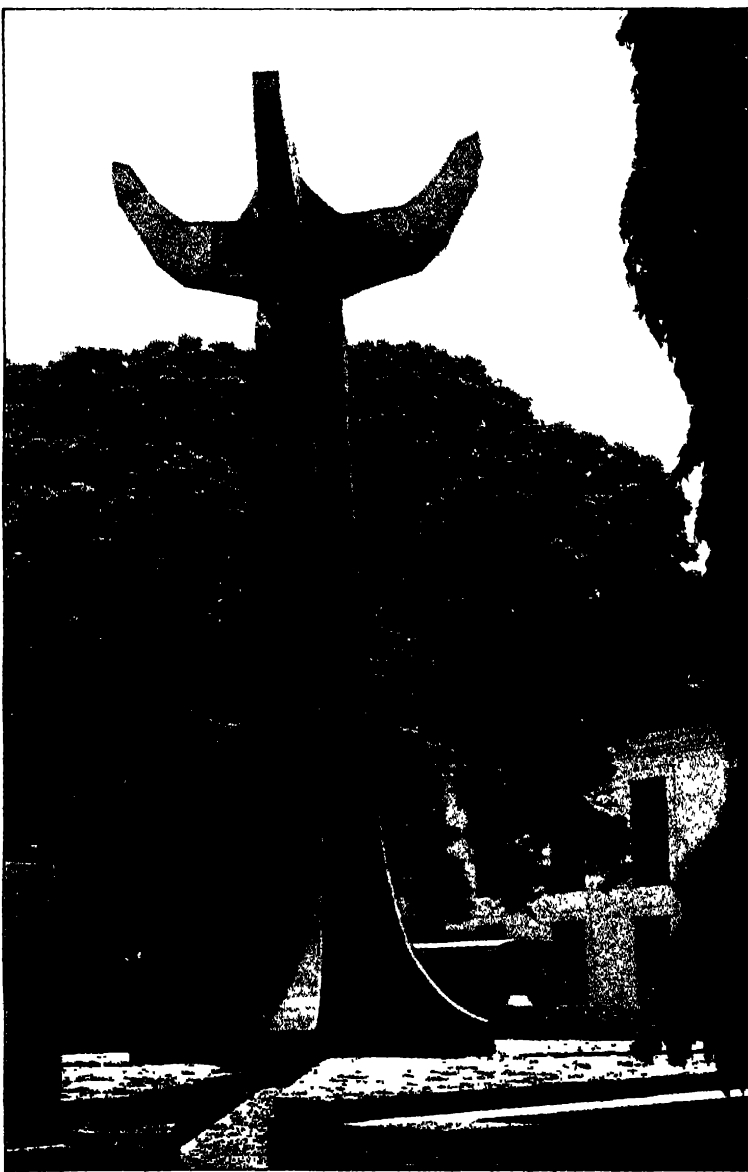
exiles to the Portuguese Parliament. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed and thousands of miles away, the dictator Salazar still gnashed his teeth over the loss of his colonial possession. It was only when Salazar's successor, Dr Marcelo Caetano, was overthrown by the socialists in 1974 that the two countries once again began diplomatic par-

leys. Portugal formally accepted Indian sovereignty over Goa and signed an agreement on cultural cooperation in the December of the same year. This move, in retrospect, was more a polite gesture and there was no substantial improvement in relations—till this year.

When Indian President R. Venkataraman visited the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, in early April this year, he was greeted with a new warmth. "The Portuguese went out of their way to make it clear that President Venkataraman's visit marked a new beginning in Indo-Portuguese relations," says K.V. Rajan, the joint secretary in charge of the Portugal desk at the Indian ministry of external affairs (MEA). Venkataraman was feasted by the Portuguese President Mario Soares, by Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva and introduced to dozens of senior ministers and officials. The Indian President was even accorded the rare honour of addressing the Portuguese Parliament, which gave him a standing ovation.

To prove that the bitterness was a thing of the past, the Portuguese government announced that it would return the assets of Goans, frozen for more than 28 years in Portugal's Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU)—the famous 'Goa gold' issue that has embittered relations for years. Over Rs 5 crores worth of deposits of gold and other ornaments made by thousands

**Martyrs' Memorial, Goa: the hatchet has been buried**



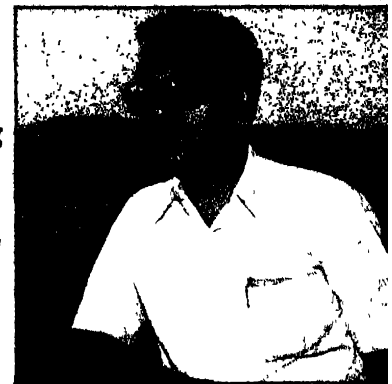


**"All former colonial powers today have good relations with us, Portugal has been the only exception. In fact, it is surprising that normalisation should have taken so long"**



RAMAKANT KHALAP (deputy CM, Goa)

**"None of Goa's internal problems can be solved by keeping the Portuguese away. Our problem is one of finding an identity which transcends religious differences."**



PRAMODE KHANDIARPARKAR (journalist)

of middle class Goans had been taken away by the BNU after the 1961 war and repeated requests by the Indian government for their return had elicited no response. But things were finally changing. The Portuguese also expressed the wish to return to India, preferably to Goa—not as colonialists this time but as friends and cultural emissaries. The hatchet, it seemed, was truly buried.

**B**ut why suddenly after 28 years? Could it merely be the result of the working of time, the great healer? Not really, feels the MEA's Rajan. "Portugal might be a small country but it is important in the scheme of the European Community (EC)," he says. "We felt it was pointless not to restore good relations and the Portuguese government reciprocated." Rajan says that the entire process of normalisation of relations was catalysed by the economic imperative.

Five centuries ago, the Portuguese had sailed to India to establish trading posts and enclaves from where they could further their commercial interests. Today, the Portuguese have retreated to the confines of their tiny coastal country. And, in a curious reversal of roles, it is the Indians who are looking to Portugal to establish industries there. Leading the race are the Tata Group and a number of Indian pharmaceutical firms. They have already sent teams to Portugal to find out what kinds of industries could be set up in that country.

"Our aim is to use Portugal as an entry point to the post-1992 European market," says Tata Services' chief executive, M Z A Baig, who visited Portugal last year as part of a Tata team invited by the Portuguese government. The main aim of the European market, Baig explains, is to allow for the free movement of goods within the 12-nation Community. Imports, on the other hand, could be taxed heavily and most manufacturers outside the Community might find their products hopelessly outpriced. Manufacturers interested in tapping the European market are consequently hurrying to establish manufacturing units within the Community to escape high tariff barriers.

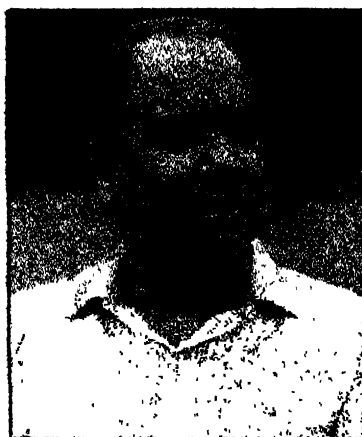
Portugal appears to be the most suitable EC country for Indian investors. "Labour costs, for instance, are relatively cheap compared to other parts of Europe," points out Rajan. The country also has a large population of people of Indian origin (from Goa and Mozambique). "The work

environment too is suitable for Indian companies," adds Baig. Because of lower labour costs, industries in Portugal do not have to be automated and highly capital intensive. Besides, the Portuguese government, which fears balance of payments problems with other EC members once the free trade proposals become operative in 1992, is offering a variety of attractive incentives to foreign companies willing to set up shop in Portugal. The government, for instance, is prepared to gift up to US \$1.5 million to units set up in Portugal.

"Portugal is keen on Indian companies because of our capabilities in the areas of automotive parts, forgings, castings, software and electronics," says Baig. The Tata Group, with its new emphasis on exploring frontiers beyond the Indian borders, intends to take full advantage of the Portuguese opening. Already, the Taj Hotels chain has located a site for a hotel in the coastal resort of Algrave and is looking for property in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, and in the industrial city of Porto. Tata Exports plans to produce high quality shoes in Portugal, while Telco is exploring possibilities for setting up a forgings and castings unit. Indian industry and the MEA are, consequently, only too determined to forget the memories of Salazar and the two-day war of December 1961.

**T**he only contentious aspect of the new Indo-Portuguese camaraderie is Portugal's

**"While we have nothing against the Portuguese and would like relations with that country to improve, the re-emphasis of our Portuguese antecedents will help project only one side of the Goan identity"**



EDUARDO FALEIRO (Congress MP)





**"My quarrel was with Portuguese colonialism and not the people or their culture. We need Portuguese books, magazines and journals—not the Portuguese themselves"**



**"Portugal today is no longer an imperialist country, and it is silly to think that Portuguese influence will damage the fabric of Goan society"**

DR. CARMO AZEVEDO (writer)

DR. P.P. SHIDODKAR (archivist)

insistence on establishing a cultural centre in Goa. The MEA and Indian industry might today retain no memories of Salazar and Portuguese colonialism, but Goans do. And not all of it is pleasant. Unlike British colonialism, Portuguese rule was marked by religious bigotry and autocracy. The Portuguese national symbol was the cross and the sword. While they constructed beautiful cathedrals in Goa, they also put to the sword Muslims and other heretics who refused to accept Christianity. After the liberation of Goa, the Portuguese offered to ship free of cost any Goan wishing to settle in Portugal. Less than 250 accepted. "That was the most devastating plebiscite—the Goans completely rejected the Portuguese," recalls 78-year-old Dr Carmo Azevedo, who has written several books on Goa's history, culture and relations with Portugal.

The Indian government fears that a Portuguese cultural centre in Goa would be undesirable and has been trying to stave off the Portuguese demand. Some prominent Goan politicians also secretly fear that the return of the Portuguese to Goa could give a fillip to the pro-Portuguese fringe groups that have sprouted in the state in recent times. They point out that the Goan society remains starkly divided between the Catholics, who comprise 28 per cent of the population, and the Hindu majority. Efforts to bridge the gap have not been successful and the new generation of Goans have become more aggressive in defending their communal identities. While there is no overt antagonism between the two principal Goan communities, this divide has been complicating matters at the political level.

"Goans are struggling to find their

own unique identity," says Eduardo Faleiro, the Congress(I) MP from Goa and former Union finance minister of the state. "While we have nothing against the Portuguese and would like relations with that country to improve, the re-emphasis of our Portuguese antecedents will project only one side of the Goan identity." Dr Azevedo concurs with this view. "There is simply no need for the Portuguese to re-establish their presence in Goa," he says. "My quarrel was with Portuguese colonialism and not the people or their culture," he adds, "And today we have a number of organisations here in Goa that are working to promote the Portuguese heritage. We need Portuguese books, magazines and journals—not the Portuguese themselves."

Dr Azevedo, however, strenuously discounts the fear of cultural colonialism. "To be frank, there are only a handful of people here who are not reconciled to the departure of the Portuguese." These are the Saudosistas, the people nostalgic for the old times when genuine port could be had for Rs 2 a bottle, when seafood was cheap and plentiful, and the tourist hordes had not yet descended on Goa to pollute the beaches and drive up prices. But these people are not the majority.

**"I**t is ridiculous to think that a cultural centre can be a colonial agency," says Dr P.P. Shidodkar, director of the Goa Archives, whose father was a Goan freedom fighter. Shidodkar, as an archivist, is more concerned about cultural cooperation with the Portuguese and in exploiting the vast repository of archival material in his libraries. "Portugal today is no longer an imperialist country," he adds, "And it is silly to think that Portuguese influence will damage the

fabric of Goan society."

Goa's deputy chief minister Ramakant Khalap is also in favour of the Portuguese returning to Goa. "All former colonial powers today have good relations with us, Portugal has been the only exception. In fact, it is surprising that normalisation should have taken so long," Khalap feels that the pro-Portuguese elements in Goa are a tiny minority and cannot decisively influence even local Goan politics.

The more enlightened in Goa, however, believe that none of Goa's internal problems can be solved by keeping the Portuguese away. "Our problem is one of finding an identity which transcends religious differences," says Pramode Khandiarparkar, a Panjim-based journalist.

The ruling Progressive Democratic Front (PDF)—which is a coalition of the pro-Hindu Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), and a group of Catholic MLAs sporting the name the Goans Peoples' Party (GPP)—took a decision to nominate a Catholic, Luis Proto Barbosa, to the chief minister's post for the first time in the state's history. "These kinds of experiments will help solve Goa's problems—the Portuguese are irrelevant," says Khandiarparkar.

"After 28 years of independence we need no longer be afraid of the Portuguese," reiterates deputy chief minister Khalap. And if he is right, it will not be long before the Portuguese return to their long-lost colonial possession. This time, merely to look back in nostalgia, recall the legendary feats of their ancestors, Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque, and search for a fast-fading history locked up in ancient archival texts. •

**Indranil Banerjee/Panaji and New Delhi**



# Dare to be different

*There's even more to Arun Nehru than meets the eye*

If Arun Nehru did not exist, profile-writers would have to invent him. After all, he is a man who makes perfect copy—even when he doesn't open his mouth. There is, first of all, the matter of his appearance. Most ministers are difficult to describe. (What do you call Madhu Dandavate? Balding? Maybe, but then that could apply to Inder Gujral and V.P. Singh. Or how do you describe somebody as average-looking as Arif Khan? You see the problem?)

But in Nehru's case, the adjectives just roll off the pen: "burly", "portly", "jowly", "weighty", "large", "fearsome", etc., etc. Then, there's the matter of personality. Try and capture the essence of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed in a phrase: "nondescript" is the best anyone can do. Of Ajit Singh, "son of Charan Singh" perhaps, but that is about it.

Nehru, however, lends himself to stereotyping. Think of an article about the commerce minister and you conjure up the following phrases: "wily manipulator...strong administrator...old style party boss...accomplished fund collector...much feared figure...master strategist, etc., etc."

It is for such reasons that the media love Arun Nehru. (And in some cases, love to hate him.) Give any journalist a list of six members of this government—say, Sharad Yadav, Raja Ramanna, M.G.K. Menon, Madhu Dandavate, P. Upendra and Dinesh Goswami—and he will ask if he can write about a seventh: Arun Nehru.

**THE TROUBLE** with all this is, of course, that nobody really writes about Nehru any longer. Instead, the profiles concentrate on the media's version of Arun Nehru: the burly political boss.

While there is some truth to the stereotype, it ignores several aspects of his personality. Some instances:

- Though nobody seems to have noticed, Nehru is the man who demolished the conventional wisdom that to understand Indian politics, you had to rise from the ranks. He went from running Jensen and Nicholson (in 1980) to running the Congress party (by 1984) without ever spending time at the bottom.
- The bully-boy image the press has saddled him with ignores his courage. Most bullies are cowards, but

Nehru likes beating the odds. In 1984, he shocked India by arranging the inexperienced Rajiv Gandhi's accession to the prime ministership at a time when most political analysts thought it would take Rajiv at least another two years to work up the guts to make a bid for the job. (Mrs Gandhi waited for two and a half years after her father's death.)

And in 1986, when Rajiv humiliated him by unceremoniously dropping him from the ministry, Nehru did not take the easy option and return to the corporate sector he had left six years ago. Though he had only one ally (Arif Mohammad Khan; V.P. Singh and the Mufti were both Cabinet ministers) and this was before Fairfax, HDW or Bofors, he decided to fight back.

In three years' time, he had helped topple Rajiv.

**INTEGRAL TO** Nehru's media image is his characterisation as a 'hardliner'. Thus, whatever the issue—the Punjab accord, negotiations with Pakistan, an Indo-US trade dispute, etc.—Nehru is always reported to have objected to any compromise and advocated a tough stance.

The characterisation is clearly unfair in that it portrays him as an unthinking hawk who believes that might will always be right. Nevertheless, Nehru does have reservations about accords, though his reasoning is more sophisticated than his publicity suggests.

He believes that while many interest groups may have genuine grievances, those that resort to violence are attempting to blackmail the state. Frequently their complaints do not have much substance but receive unnecessary attention because they have used terror tactics. (Were the people of Punjab much worse off than the people of Bihar in early 1984?)

Often, the state sends out the wrong signals in dealing with such agitations. It attempts to negotiate with terrorists and its initiative is perceived as weakness. And sometimes it signs accords with one faction while ignoring another. Such agreements can never last.

In 1985, Nehru told Rajiv that the Punjab accord would not work if he persisted in excluding P.S. Badal. Rajiv would not listen and, within two years, had to dismiss the Barnala ministry. Now, Nehru's position is that to negotiate with Kashmiri militants

whose basic demand—*azaadi*—is untenable will serve no purpose.

Restore law and order first, he says. And then worry about talking to the terrorists.

**NEHRU'S POSITIONS** are unpopular because they promise no quick results, no glorious agreements and

no pretty pictures for television. Because of his media image, it is easy to caricature his stands and to portray them as the responses of a bully and a strongman.

History, however, is on Nehru's side. He was right on Punjab in 1985 and right on Kashmir in 1987. Of course, this does not mean that he is right again in 1990. But it does suggest that he might be worth listening to. •

**Nobody really writes about Nehru any longer. Instead, the profiles concentrate on the media's version of Arun Nehru: the burly political boss**







# WHAT ON EARTH IS A FORMULA-1 RADIAL?



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**FOR BETTER CAR CONTROL**





# BRUTE FORCE

*The Kashmiris are alienated as the security forces step up counter-insurgency operations*

**I**t is a weird game that is being played out in Kashmir. At the end of each violent day, the administration gathers at Jagmohan's well-fortified Governor's House in Srinagar and, over cups of steaming *kehwa*, discuss how well the security forces have succeeded in countering terrorism. A head count is even taken of the "militants" eliminated. Everyone present agrees with Governor Jagmohan that the administration certainly has the "upper hand" in the battle for Kashmir.

But no one gets to the crux of the problem: the gradual alienation of the people from the Indian government. And if anything is responsible for this, it is the security forces' high-handedness and brutality. Take for instance, the events following the murder of the vice-chancellor of the Kashmir University and the general manager of HMT by militants on the morning of 10 April.

By noon on 11 April, the search operations in the valley had intensified. From six that morning to well past midnight, the residents of downtown Batmaloo paid the price for the action of the "freedom fighters" (terrorists, to the rest of the world). Sixteen days of curfew followed. And in New Delhi the power-wielders raved about the phenomenal success their crackdowns were yielding. The press too hailed the state administration.

Here are a few newspaper reports:

● 11 April: "Yesterday's raids fetched good results. At least 25 terrorists

have been held during search operations."

● 12 April: "Over 200 arrested as the army and paramilitary forces continued their valley-wide search for the killers (of Haq and Khera). Most of the arrests were made in Batmaloo, where over 1500 houses were combed. Over a thousand houses were searched in Natipora and Chhanpora localities. The Prime Minister said that measures taken by the government to re-establish authority in the Kashmir valley and isolate the militants have begun yielding results."

● 16 April: "Twelve 'area commanders' of the JKLF were among 150 arrested in Srinagar. Jagmohan announced that under the drive in the last nine days alone, 177 subversives, including hardcore terrorists, had been arrested."

● 19 April: "Security forces today killed five militants and arrested 72. The strong measures taken by the administration have started yielding encouraging results. In a changed mood today, some people were seen voluntarily cleaning JKLF slogans from the walls of their houses and removing flags. Observers viewed this change as 'healthy'."

● 20 April: "The Mufti claimed that the situation in Kashmir had undergone a sea-change. In the new situation, militants and ultras were generally breaking down and 'singing like parrots'. The process would have to be continued to improve the situation."

● 25 April: "At Jagmohan's Iftaar party at Raj Bhavan, no locals turned up. They were said to be under



**A policeman frisking people: tough measures is not the answer**

pressure from militant organisations to stay away."

**C**aught in the crossfire between the militants and the armed forces, the seven lakh people of Kashmir find it very difficult to think in terms of a better tomorrow. Whatever press reports might suggest, normalcy is a far cry. The valley is ominously calm during curfew and combing operations. But the residents of downtown Srinagar have a sad story to relate.





JAGDISH YADAV

Everyone, they say, who has chosen to stay on in Kashmir is branded a subversive, a terrorist or an anti-Indian; the "innocents" have all fled the state. And they are not very wrong. "You say innocents are being killed?" exclaims a member of the Kashmiri Migrants Forum in New Delhi angrily. "There is not one single innocent there—they are all anti-Indians." For the average Indian today, the Kashmiri is an enemy.

"I have always loved India," swears Nujhat, a university lecturer in her thirties who has resisted repeated warnings from her relatives in Delhi to

leave the valley. "But last week, I wondered what this India really meant. They have forsaken us, written us off." With deep anguish she remembers the day the army burst into her garden, lined up the menfolk of the house outside and frisked the women. Her husband, who is a loyal Indian, cannot forgive himself for having been so helpless when it all happened. "They were shocked to see a biography of Nehru in the study. I told them they would find thousands of them in the valley. If this is my plight today, what about the poor people who have nobody to phone up

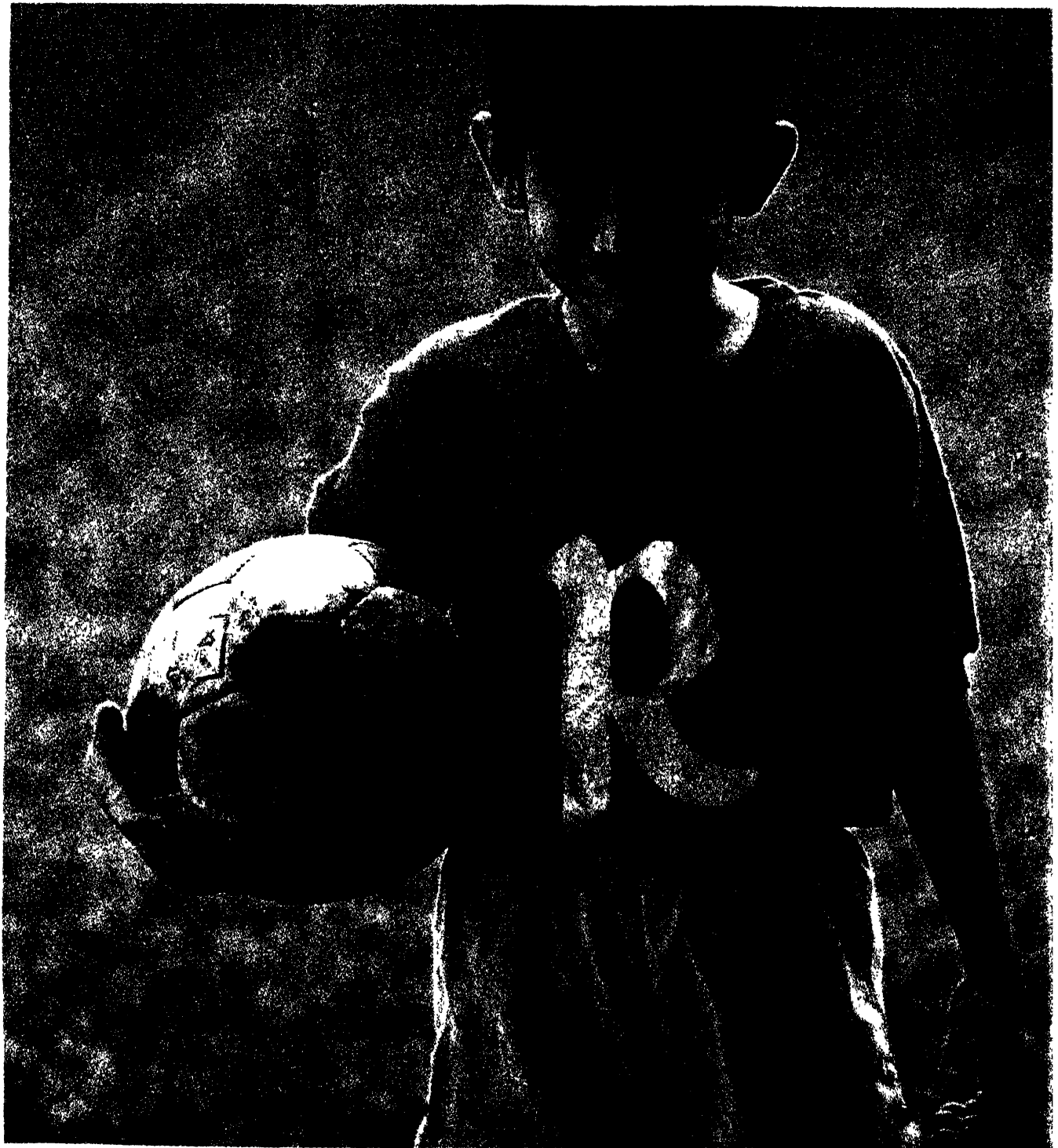
and nobody to turn to for help?"

"No, there is nobody to turn to for help, we are all damned, we are all called pro-Pakistanis," says a head constable in the JK Armed Police wondering why he has spent so much of his life in service. "They had no respect for this uniform when they burst into my house and grabbed my only son at midnight. The jawan pushed me aside, spitting '*saala Pakistani*', and shoved me to the wall with the butt of his gun. India has given up the people of Kashmir to ensure that they keep the territory?"

The home minister had confidently



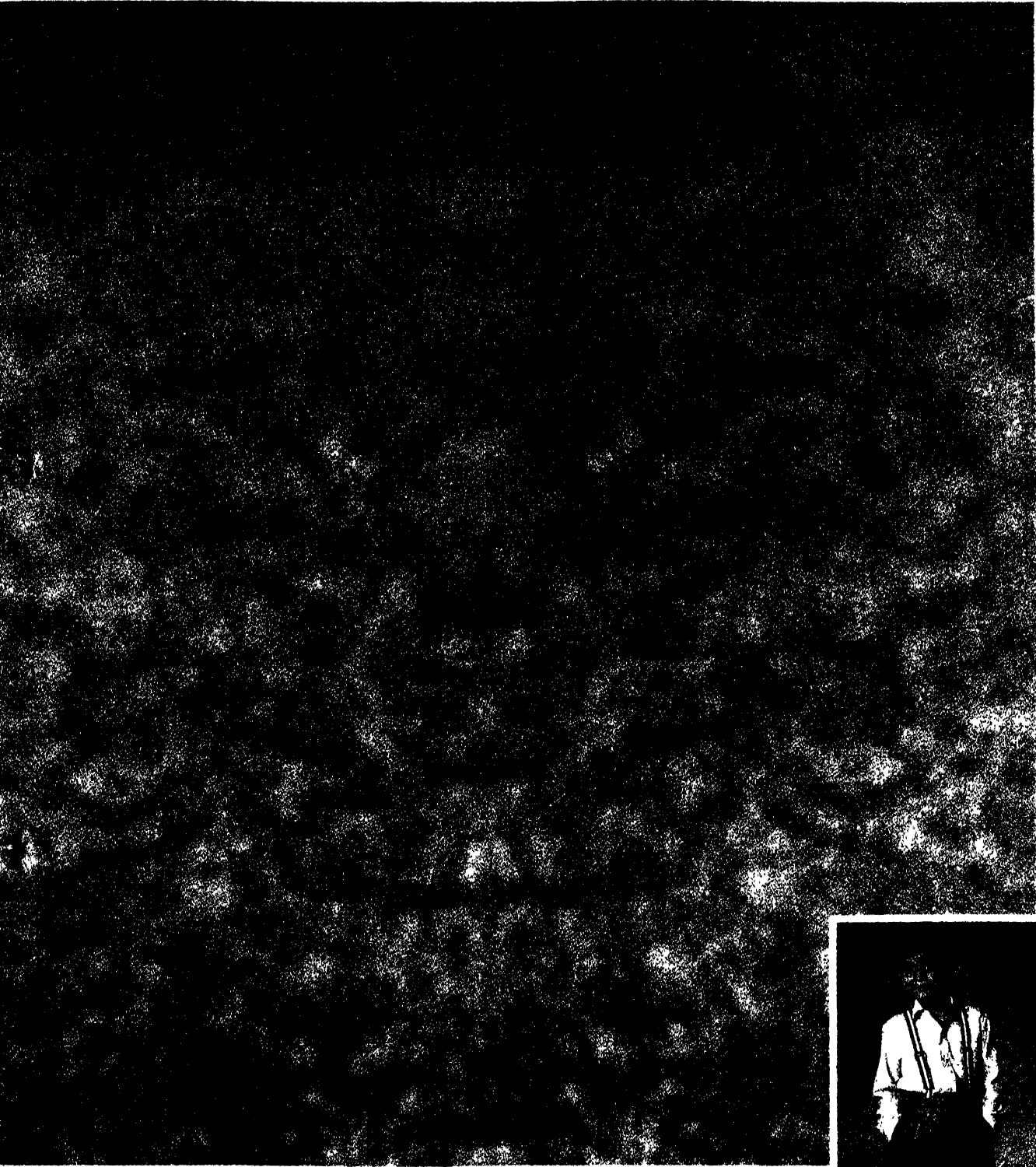
You don't have to be a Raymond's man  
to be a Raymond's man.



Harsh Dev, football terror of the under-tens, is a striker of unnerving accuracy. "Yum," he says when the ball whizzes into the far corner of the net. It is a word he uses - with rare discrimination - to describe the things he likes: roast chicken, for instance, or "Crazy Jungle Adventures"







or that devilishly intricate computer game, "Zap the Zebra" of which he is an undisputed master.

Alas, "Yum" is a word he never applies to the antics of his little sister, Divya, who "bugs my mummy and daddy up the wall," and - worse yet - will never make it to big

league football.

When not running circles around hapless half-backs, Harsh may be seen at the occasional party zapping the opposition in l-o-n-g pants tailored from that other smash hit, Raymond's Pantaloni.

You don't have to be a football hero to be a

Raymond's man. For that matter you don't even have to be a Raymond's man. ... but it helps.

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Never say no to life.







(Above) A youth beaten up by the cops: harsh treatment, (left) Kashmiri women demonstrating for justice: all for the militants

proclaimed that the Id celebrations in Kashmir would be "normal" "There is no Id here," wails the mother of 19-year-old Shakeel in Chhanpora. "They dragged my son out of his room, and the fact that my husband was a government employee for decades didn't help to get us any mercy. We don't know where he is now, or if he is alive. All I know is that if they do anything to him, I will never forgive India."

**A**s little children play hopscotch and queue up to buy orange-sticks in the drizzle, the resilience of a battered community is very much in evidence. "We have nothing against the Indian people, it is the repression that we cannot bear," says Amina Begum, trying hard to retain her composure. Five days before Id, her husband went out during curfew hours to buy vegetables. The jawan shot him in the shoulder. "He lay there in the dirt, clutching at the two small brinjals," she sobs.

The Hassan family in Chhota Bazar were luckier. Their son, though beaten badly by the cops, survived. It all happened when the women of the house were washing the drawing room carpet during curfew. The jawans who were on duty in the locality mistook the red water that flowed out into the drain for blood. They broke into the

house and insisted that both Mushir-ul Haq and Abdul Ghami—their bodies were found that morning—were murdered in their house. The CRPF officer on duty in the area admits that it was a mistake, but hastily adds, "You never know with these people. They all have links with militants."

"In a people's movement, everybody is bound to know the militants," explains a senior journalist. "After all, if approximately 5,000 boys from the valley have turned militants, how is it possible that nobody knows them?" he asks indignantly. Zubeda Begum of Nowpara insists that her family has no connections with the "boys who are fighting for our freedom". On the afternoon of 19 April, her 65-year-old husband Mohammed Ibrahim Magloo, owner of the Mughal Darbar restaurant, and his five sons were

taken away by the cops. The old man and the two sons, including the youngest Javed, who is 16 and mentally retarded, were released after a week. It was only the neighbours who helped the family during the seven agonising days. But the trauma will continue until the other sons return home.

"The limits of harassment have been crossed," declares a government official in Anantnag. "They make people pick up the dirt from the drains and rub it over the JKLF signs, and then they say that things are improving. Our little children are made to do *murga*", and it takes a while to discover what they are talking about. Explains a local journalist: "A heavy stone is placed on their backs, and they are made to do sit-ups while the forces stand by and use the worst abuses possible."

**The Kashmiris are gradually being alienated from the Indian government. The security forces' brutality is solely responsible for this**

**T**he atmosphere outside the Jama Masjid on the morning of Id is tense. It is not the right time to talk of police atrocities. But the mood is more defiant than festive. Within the ancient mosque, Maulvi Farooq makes an impassioned and inflammatory speech; the thousands who have gathered here to offer *namaz* hang their heads in mourning as the head priest announces the names of the "martyrs" of the valley.





(Above) Jagmohan: not aware of the ground realities, (left) Kashmiris demonstrating outside a Srinagar hospital: difficult to recognise the militants

"Whom do we turn to for help?" shouts a young man in the crowd. His brother, Parvez Ahmed Khan, lost his life fighting the security forces. "They chased him into a stream, and pushed him in the water with their rifle-butts screaming, 'Azaadi, chahiye? Wahu milegi (you want freedom? You'll get it in there)'" "We recovered his body hours later," recalls Ghulam Ahmed, his close friend, sadly. "There was nothing we could do to save him."

In Anantnag, the family members of Ghulam Mohammad Khanday are too shocked to speak. The small-time shopkeeper, in his mid-30s, had nothing to do with the militants yet he was picked up by the forces for interrogation. Khanday died in custody after 11 days. A CRPF official admits that Khanday had nothing to reveal.

The paramilitary forces and the army, however, cannot be blamed for the excesses. After all they are trained to fight wars, not subversives. The Jammu and Kashmir Police, which could have been effectively used to weed out the guerrillas, has been sidelined and some of its personnel are actually helping out the militants in frustration. The state's intelligence network, whatever the Governor might claim, is no match for the militants' information-gathering system.

A month after the forces launched an all-out offensive, the militants are, for the first time this year, on the defensive—there is no doubt that at the moment the government does have the "upper hand." However, compared to the scale of the operation, the results are not as "encouraging" as is being made out to be by the home ministry and the Governor.

Because of the widespread support the militants enjoy, the army and the paramilitary forces have had to admit defeat over and over again. "It has taken two years for the boys to arm themselves and get trained—it will take at least two years to completely weed out terrorist elements," assesses a

**The state's intelligence network, whatever the Governor might claim, is no match for the militants' information-gathering system**

senior police official. "But as things stand, whatever luck the BSF and the CRPF have had is partly due to chance and partly due to information from the interrogations, but the success is not proportionate to the scale of the operation," he adds.

The helplessness of the forces is well-illustrated by the events on the morning of Id. The day before, JKLF leaders had asked the people to congregate at the Idgah grounds for their *namaaz*, and warned them not to respond to the call of Maulvi Farooq to gather at the Jama Masjid. Anticipating a large number of militants at the open Idgah *mandan*, hundreds of paramilitary personnel were stationed there. At the last minute the JKLF changed its plans, and instructed the people to gather at the Jama Masjid. Soon after the masses had assembled, a number of JKLF militants surfaced. Not a single jawan could be seen in the vicinity. Their faces masked, the militants made hurried exhortations to the people to hold out in these hard times, before disappearing as suddenly as they had appeared. The market outside was lined with "boys" keeping guard. "Our biggest problem is that we just don't recognise the militants," admits an army officer, adding, "When that is the case, everybody is suspect." •

**Shiraz Siddha/Srinagar and Anantnag**



# "There is a difference

*George Fernandes on  
J&K Governor  
Jagmohan and the  
situation in the valley*

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*He is the minister for Kashmir affairs, but has been told in no uncertain terms by the state administration that he should keep away from the valley. While George Fernandes has in the past denied that he has serious differences with Governor Jagmohan or the home ministry over Kashmir, it is obvious that the minister has been severely handicapped because he has been "prevented" from visiting Srinagar. Last fortnight, George Fernandes received a terse telegram from the Governor, saying that the minister would only upset the "rhythm" of the operations by visiting the valley. Excerpts from an interview with George Fernandes*

**SUNDAY:** The Prime Minister has asked you not to visit Kashmir for the next two months. Does this mean that you are not being allowed to manage Kashmir affairs the way you planned to?

**George Fernandes:** It will be wrong to say that the PM is not allowing me to go to Kashmir. I have not been to the valley for about a month because the Governor has either directly or through the home minister conveyed the message that I am not welcome in the state. It is also true that even the advisory committee attached to the ministry of Kashmir affairs is not allowed to visit the valley till he (the Governor) gives the clearance.

**Q:** You used to visit Srinagar often. Are you being hampered by this restriction?

**A:** Yes, it is coming in the way of my being effective. But I have in the meanwhile visited Ladakh, addressed public meetings in Kargil, Padam and Zaskar, have been to Rajouri, Poonch and Doda districts. I am doing my work of meeting the people, sorting out their problems and removing the sense of alienation to the extent I can.

**Q:** But you were appointed special minister mainly to look into the crisis in the valley, not Ladakh?

**A:** I was appointed primarily to coordinate the work of the various ministries and departments and to help restore normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir. This, in my view, included making all possible efforts to wean away the terrorists from the path they have chosen

by convincing them that it was possible to resolve the issue raised by them within the framework of the Indian Constitution. These young people are terribly upset over the corruption that had engulfed the state during the last four decades and which had come in the way of the economic development of the valley. They are also worried over the mockery of the election pro-





# 'in approach'

cess in the state. Every one of them makes the point that the only fair election witnessed in the state was in 1977, when the Janata Party was in power. One other thing that needs to be done is to help the 3.5 million people of the valley to carry on their life and work without much hindrance from the state. The activities of the terrorists have created conditions in which the

people have to face great difficulties in leading their normal lives. This in turn has alienated them further. I believe that it is a part of my responsibility to do away with the hardships faced by the people.

**Q: But the people don't blame the militants for their plight; they blame the government. Do you really believe that the situation is improving?**

**A:** The problem in Kashmir is going to take a long time in getting resolved and to measure the improvement or deterioration by the number of people killed on either side each day or by the duration of the curfew and the non-curfew hours is simply absurd.

**Q: But do you believe that the present policies being pursued will help solve the crisis?**

**A:** I think the situation in the valley is going to deteriorate further, particularly with the opening of the passes and the influx of a large number of Kashmiri youths who have gone across the frontier for training in the use of weapons.

**Q: Does that mean you blame Pakistan for the problems in Kashmir?**

**A:** Pakistan would certainly want to fish in troubled waters, and that is why it is important that we do not allow

Kashmir to be in a state of constant turmoil.

**Q: What do you suggest should be done to improve things in Kashmir? The hard line being adopted doesn't seem to have solved the problem...**

**A:** We need to have a multi-pronged strategy in dealing with the situation. The most important aspect of that



**CRPF jawans keep vigil: when will peace return?**

strategy should be to convince the youth that there are ways other than the use of force to achieve one's goal.

**Q: But the militants have time and again said that they will accept nothing short of *azaadi* (freedom). How do you plan to get them around?**

**A:** In Doda, not one person was willing to talk to me. I leave alone talk of *azaadi*. But I went to the *masjid* where they had assembled and spoke to them. The problems they discussed with me were no different from the problems faced by the people of other states.

**Q: You have consistently denied that there are differences between you, the Governor and the home minister. And yet, it is obvious that there are problems. How are your approaches different, and how do you plan to resolve these differences?**

**A:** Yes, there is a difference in approach. When I am asked these questions about differences, what is sought to be implied is that we are pulling in different directions. My point is that there are differences in perception and there are differences with regard to emphasis and priorities.

I believe that while dealing with subversives and insurgency, we should do nothing that alienates the people further away from us, nor should we believe that terrorists cannot be brought around. The people of Kashmir have been the most peace-loving people in India. If they have taken to violence, then they must have had very compelling reasons to take the risks. We should remove those hardships, and I believe it is possible to do that.

**Q: Do you feel that initiating a political process, as you have been advocating**

**is the answer?**

**A:** Last fortnight, I visited Kargil, Padam, and Zaskar and held two massive public meetings. That is a part of initiating the political process, or if you wish to call it political activity.

**Q: But the situation in Ladakh is not quite the same as in the valley...**

**A:** It is necessary to do similar things in the valley. Whether this can be done tomorrow, or a month or two from now is something on which one could be flexible. Moreover, meetings with individuals, or with groups of people, is also part of the continued process of political activity.

**Q: But there are reports that those you have met in the valley have all been arrested by Jagmohan.**

**A:** Quite a few people I met have either been arrested or are under surveillance.

**Q: Does this not make your efforts counter-productive?**

**A:** One keeps making efforts, and I don't think one should allow these little irritants to come in the way of our larger goal. •

**Interviewed by Shiraz Sidhva/New Delhi**



**T**he country had stopped taking poll promises seriously. Elections were fought on slogans. Pakistan, poverty, democracy and national unity were the themes of political hard-sell. November 1989 changed most of that. Corruption in high places might have been the big issue, but it was not the only slogan. Prime Minister aspirant V P Singh was not merely selling himself to the electorate, but also to deeply entrenched and increasingly vociferous powers in state capitals and district towns. He had to come out with promises and the outlines of policies that would provide a real alternative to the overbearing, centralised politics of Rajiv Gandhi. The result was a manifesto, apparently not very different from the ones routinely churned out by parties in the past, but, in essence, promising several radical changes.

As it turned out, V P Singh and his Janata Dal did not get a clear mandate. Power had to be shared with the CPI(M), the DMK and the BJP. The poll manifesto that might have, in other circumstances, been forgotten and set aside, suddenly assumed great importance. It was a document that was destined for constant reference. If Prime Minister V P Singh was to be judged, it could only be in reference to the promises contained in his manifesto. And judged he is being at every instant, at every step. Only the verdict is not clear. The problem is a bewildering array of unrelated issues. In several areas, the new government has clearly failed but it has still, almost miraculously, managed to project the image of conscientiously pushing against the tide of opposition and unkind events.

"This is the first time, the masses and the ruling party are aware of poll promises," says Sharad Yadav, Union textiles minister and leader of a powerful Janata Dal faction. "Ours is the first government that is talking about its commitments and is con-

stantly talking about keeping its promises." And this has touched a chord in the people. "The masses know that this government has come to power in traumatic times and after a great struggle against the entrenched Congress(I)," adds Nitish Kumar, minister of state for agriculture. The National Front government still has time. Dharmesh Varma, a young Janata Dal MP from Bettiah (Bihar) feels that the electorate will give this government a long rope. "People know that if Rajiv Gandhi had come back to power, nothing would have changed, extreme capitalism and the new mafiosi would

ises and are not able to take firm decisions in any matter." Congressmen point out how the National Front's poll promises—such as making right to work a fundamental right, giving genuine independence to the official media, checking price rise, establishing amicable relations with neighbours and solving the Punjab problem with the 'healing touch'—look more than a little ridiculous today.

But what V P Singh's detractors forget is that the electorate is not looking for miracles. It is looking for a government that endeavours to solve their problems. And people are prepared to wait—even for five years. "And then if we don't perform, we will be thrown out," says Sharad Yadav. For the moment, V P Singh might have lost most of his battles, but he is yet to lose the war. His report card

# THE GOVERNMENT'S REPORT CARD

*The Raja's regime makes the grade—but only just*



**PROBITY IN  
PUBLIC LIFE**

**GRADE: A**

**V**ishwanath Pratap Singh is probably the only politician in Indian history to have successfully built a career on an anti-corruption crusade. Thus, it is only fitting that the man who resigned from Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet over the investigation of kick-

backs to the Hinduja brothers in the HDW submarine deal should head what is the cleanest Indian government in over 20 years.

In the last days of the Rajiv raj, the tendency to make big money on public sector deals had been curtailed by the Bofors exposures, but the government's reputation for uprightness took a knocking on three grounds.

- It launched a Watergate-style cover-up to prevent the truth from being known about the Bofors and HDW deals

- It allowed a few business houses

have continued to thrive. Now they know that the old process has been checked and are waiting to see what new processes are initiated by our government," says Varma.

V P Singh's critics, of course, believe that the government has already failed, that it was destined to fail. "The Janata Dal made wild promises before the polls, perhaps they did not seriously think they would ever come to power," feels Congress(I) Rajya Sabha MP P Shiv Shankar. "Now they find they can't fulfil those prom-



(notably Dhirubhai Ambani's Reliance) to do pretty much as they pleased

• With the top being widely perceived as corrupt, the lower rungs felt no compunctions about accepting bribes.

Under V.P. Singh, much of that has ended. Today, no minister would dare to be openly corrupt for fear that the Prime Minister's Office would immediately act against him. The government has indicated its seriousness about cleansing public life by introducing the Lok Pal Bill in Parliament. Once enacted, the Lok Pal and Lok Ayuktas will be empowered to investigate any elected representative.

This is not to say that low-level corruption does not persist or that individual ministers do not accept bribes from some persons, but that in the public's mind the 10% raj has ended.

V.P. Singh's government has been less successful in its endeavour to indicate to the country that no business house has a special claim. While finance minister Madhu Dandavate and his secretary Bimal Jalan are the cleanest men in this regime, the feeling still persists that they have been unable to act against the likes of Reliance.

Dhirubhai Ambani is alleged to have used his influence with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and with Jyoti Basu to work out a deal over Larsen & Toubro (L&T) at a time when defeat stared Reliance in the face. According to sources in the government, however, this is an illusion. Reliance will find that the supplier's credit advanced to it by L&T will soon be modified and the massive L&T debenture issue be re-examined. Even if this happens, supporters of the regime are hard-pressed to explain why the Life Insurance Corporation's attack on the Ambani presence in L&T turned into a tactical retreat.

The government has faced more success in its attempts to get to the bottom of the deals signed during the Rajiv regime. It has filed chargesheets

on the following issues: Bofors, HDW and the A320.

Of the three, the Bofors FIR is the most substantial. For three years, the Rajiv Gandhi regime told lies and made out that the Swiss would not part with any information. But now the launch of dual investigations by Paul Perraudin in Geneva and Dieter Jan in Zurich demonstrate that the facts are not as elusive as had been made out.

Sadly, the investigating team under additional solicitor general Arun Jaitley and the Central Bureau of Investigation's K. Madhavan has damaged its

Punjab and Kashmir, there is a very real danger that corruption will lose its impact as an issue.



**FOREIGN  
POLICY**

**GRADE: C**

**T**he country was promised peace. But it looks as if it will be war instead. The National Front govern-

ment had started off by talking about ushering in a new era of peace and *bonhomie* in the subcontinent. Sabre-rattling, adventurism and playing Big Brother in the subcontinent was to end. But within weeks of coming to power, the V.P. Singh government seems to have realised that peace is easier proclaimed than achieved. With Kashmir in flames and intelligence reports pointing to Pakistan's involvement, the government was forced to abandon all pretensions at playing the good guy and turn overtly hawkish.

This U-turn might not have been perceived as a failure, but the government's detractors claim that it points to a dangerous lack of foresight on the part of V.P. Singh and the National Front manifesto-framers. The critics feel that Prime Minister Singh has been doing

far too little to end Pakistani subversion in Kashmir and Punjab. The Congress(I)'s Pranab Mukherjee recalls that Mrs Indira Gandhi, in contrast, had handled the 1971 India-Pakistan conflict with consummate skill, speaking little and all the while secretly working to place her pieces in position. The timing of the war and the sequence of events were all of her choosing. Pakistan was dismembered, India occupied a few thousand square miles of west Pakistani territory and took 95,000 prisoners of war—all in the space of 14 days. Before the inter-

## UNDER SCRUTINY

VIJENDAR TYAGI



**V.P. SINGH**



**GUJRAL**



**DANDAVATE**



**SAYEED**

own case by releasing false stories to the press, telling lies and thriving on leaks and innuendos. The saga of the alleged sixth account is just one such instance. On HDW, the government is in the inenviable position of knowing who the agents are (the Hindujas), but being unable to prove how they received the money. And the A320 FIR is a joke, blaming low-level officials while ignoring the real culprits.

Worse still, while the going was good, the corruption investigations had some impact. But now, as things begin to take a turn for the worse in



national community could react, Mrs Gandhi had declared a unilateral ceasefire and the whole world knew that Pakistan was defeated.

Today, though V P Singh has been talking almost daily of settling scores with Pakistan, there is no clear enunciation of any specific strategic objective. "The government has not spelled out or even hinted what our war aims should be," points out *Indian Defence Review* (IDR) research team's Major Shankar Bhaduri. Will a war aim at liberating Pakistan, Occupied Kashmir, seizing a chunk of territory as a bargaining chip, crippling Pakistan economically or dismembering Pakistan? The absence of a cohesive doctrine could be disastrous, warns Major Bhaduri.

Others add that this is not the time for belligerence and that V P Singh would be making a big mistake by precipitating a war now. Neither the Soviet Union nor the United States would like a war in South Asia and Congress(I) MP and former Union minister P Shiv Shankar says that the National Front government has put India at a further disadvantage by not making strenuous efforts to ensure that the Soviet Union remains as firmly committed to India's foreign policy aims. "I get the impression that because of this government and its manner of functioning, there has been a slight shift in the Soviet Union's policy on Kashmir. I am not at all certain whether the Soviets would go to the extent of vetoing anti-India proposals coming from the western countries."

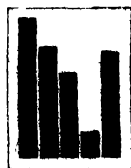
**THE PRESENT** government's short-sightedness in foreign policy is evident even from the line it took on Nepal. The government, in retrospect, had not assessed the strength of the pro-democracy movement in that country and had been making friendly noises towards the monarchy. When the Nepali Congress invited Indian political parties in early March this year to attend the convention at Kathmandu, the Congress(I) and the communist



**PAKISTAN** Despite the gestures, both VP and Yaqub Khan are in a belligerent mood

parties sent delegates, but the Janata Dal did not. Chandra Shekhar defied the government and went on his own. Consequently, today Chandra Shekhar has more clout in Nepal than the Indian ministry of external affairs.

The National Front manifesto on foreign policy, in retrospect, makes sad reading. "It will strengthen global peace initiatives. The National Front government will take bold and creative initiatives to weave a pattern of cooperative friendship with neighbours." If the National Front government continues displaying the kind of boldness and creativity it has been displaying in foreign policy matters, Rajiv Gandhi's Sri Lankan adventure could well end up looking like a picnic in comparison.



## ECONOMY

**GRADE: B+**

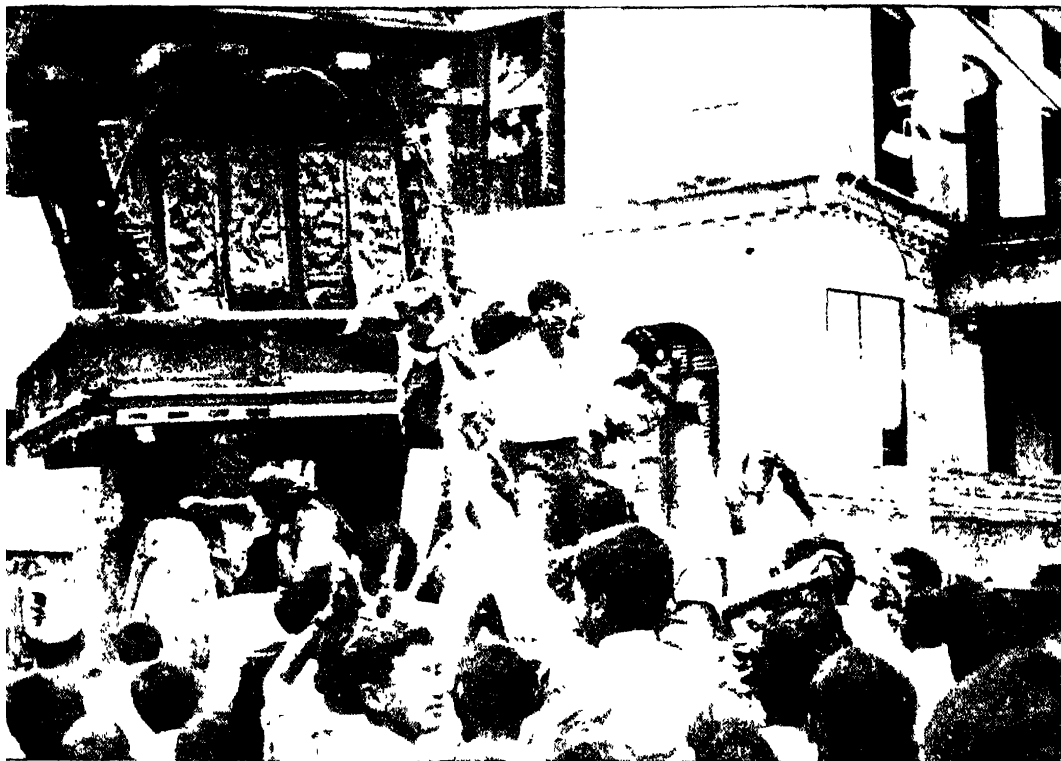
If there was any one message grassroots political workers were sending to their leaders before the November 1989 polls, it was about the mass

dissatisfaction with economic conditions. People at the very lowest strata were voicing their refusal to continue accepting the sub-human quality of life that had become their lot. They wanted change. They expected not merely a clean government, but a government genuinely concerned about providing a degree of prosperity to the millions subsisting in the rural backwaters of this country.

Prime Minister V P Singh had cottoned on to these sub-surface cravings and had tailored his poll manifesto to address the demands. The National Front manifesto defines its economic task as comprising the following: poverty eradication, right to work, ending wrong policies, providing basic needs, developing agriculture, land reforms, ensuring low cost farm inputs and remunerative prices, controlling the foreign debt and reshaping the form of industrialisation, among other things. Most of all, the manifesto promised structural changes in the economy and a shift of emphasis to the rural sector.

After coming to power, Prime Minister Singh, his finance minister Madhu Dandavate and finance secretary Dr Bimal Jalan went about proving that they were in right earnest. As a first step, the Five Year





## NEPAL The government underestimated the strength of the pro-democracy movement

Plan prepared by the Rajiv Gandhi government was scrapped and a different set of economists were brought in to prepare a people oriented plan. Next came the budget, where 49 per cent of spending was earmarked for the rural sector. V P Singh, at a meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), spoke about his government's determination to steer clear of foreign debt. In all, the government gave the impression of consistency in its approach to economic problems.

**BUT THAT** was the good part. The bad news was that the solutions being bandied about were old, some of them discredited, and the government as a whole did not seem clear on how precisely it would restructure the economy and usher in an era of prosperity. The government was talking, for instance, of reserving production of mass consumption items to the cottage and small scale sector. "But that's ridiculous!" exclaims former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee,

pointing out that experience has shown that while the cottage and small scale sectors are more labour-intensive, the cost of production of items manufactured by them are often prohibitive. A modern mill can produce better and cheaper products. Within the government, too, opinion on such issues is divided and this is one reason why the National Front's new Five Year Plan is yet to be formulated.

## BUDGET It induced a sharp rise in prices—poll promises seemed to be forgotten



NITIN RAI

"The plan period has started but there is no plan, the entire long drawn out process of finalising the plan, consulting with state governments, is yet to begin," points out Mukherjee. He says that the low level of plan allocation made in the latest budget is equally worrying. "Normally the outlay of every Five Year Plan is double the size of the previous plan," explains Mukherjee. The Sixth Plan outlay for the public sector, for instance, was about Rs 97,500 crores, and nearly doubled to Rs 1,80,000 crores in the Seventh Plan. The Eighth Plan outlay for central plan investment should be in the order of Rs 3,50,000 crores.

"This works out to an annual increase of 20 per cent," he says, "but

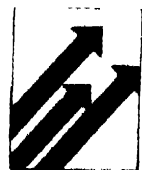
this budget has provided for a 14 per cent increase and if this trend continues, there is bound to be slow-down in the economy since plan expenditure directly affects overall growth rates."

Mukherjee, having analysed the National Front's economic policies, feels that a lot of it is ill-thought-out and often contradictory. "The plan approach paper said the new government will not accept indiscriminate liberalisation and yet the government has come out with a highly liberal long-term export-import policy," he says. Similarly, the government has been talking about providing employment in rural areas but has, at the same time, discontinued giving special incentives for the setting up of industries in backward areas. It has also discontinued the investment allowance provisions that encouraged industries to modernise and expand. "But most surprising of all is the statement that the new plan will not have targets," says Mukherjee. "Why have a plan in the first place if you are going to do away with targets, which are nothing but the quantification of aims?"

The government's economic thinkers seem to have forgotten about the basic duality in the Indian economy—one highly developed sector that re-



quires to be modern and competitive and the other much bigger disorganised sector that languishes at the pre-industrial stage. The failure to address this duality seems to be at the root of the government's confusion. While Rajiv Gandhi had laid stress on the more modern sector, the Raja's priority is the vast, backward sector. How to spur growth in both sectors is a secret that the National Front government is yet to learn.



## PRICES

GRADE: D —

The National Front's greatest failure is clearly on the price front. V P Singh had made the pre-election price rise a major campaign issue and in his manifesto had declared "Abnormal price rise will be checked by firm control on deficit financing and inflation, strict enforcement of financial discipline, austerity in public expenditure and progressive reduction in non-development expenditure." But the government has achieved precisely the opposite. And Janata Dal MPs are aghast.

Harkeval Prasad, a Dal MP, declares that he will sue the finance and food & civil supplies ministers for acting against the National Front manifesto. "I can't show my face in my constituency because of the price rise," he laments. "Being a member of the ruling party, we do not know how

to defend the government." According to him, apart from essential commodities, prices of basic goods too have increased—cement (up from Rs 62 per bag to over Rs 100), iron (from Rs 800 per quintal to Rs 1,200), *vanaspathi* (from Rs 350 per tin to Rs 500) and kerosene (from Rs 3 to Rs 5 per litre). Statistics show that prices have been increasing steadily after the latest budget and the wholesale price index has shot up from 169 points to 172 points by 21 April. The increase in consumer prices has been even steeper, averaging 15-20 per cent for most essential commodities.

This sudden rise is not fortuitous but the direct result of the budget. Pranab Mukherjee says that the government has introduced inflation through two means. Firstly, Mukherjee feels that the deficit of Rs 7,206 crores shown in the budget is a doctored figure, arrived at by drastically scaling down estimates of central dearness allowance payments, subsidies and likely defence expenditure. Secondly, tax burden and administered prices of petroleum products and railway freight have been increased sharply. "These increases will be passed on to consumers and we are going to see a return to double-digit inflation," warns Mukherjee. During the 1980s, the Indian economy experienced double-digit inflation in only two years: 1980-81, 16.7 per cent, which was brought down to 2.4 per cent the next year; and in 1987-88, when a nationwide drought pushed inflation rates to 10.7 per cent. Last year (1989-90), inflation again crept up to 8.5 per cent and how V P Singh will be able to keep his promises on prices is anybody's guess. What is certain, however, is that he is not going to get too much done by merely threatening hoarders and blackmarketeers—they have prevailed longer than politicians.



## LAW AND ORDER

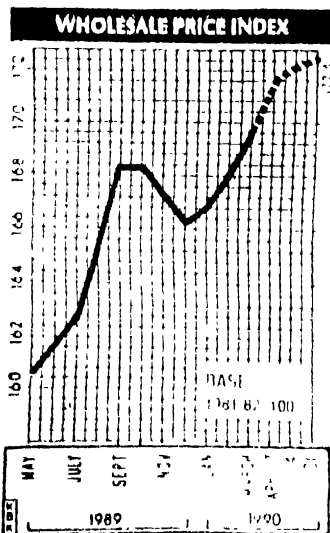
GRADE: D —

The rule of law and human safety are two basic guarantees that every government has to provide. In recent years, however, it was becoming apparent that the Centre and state governments were proving increasingly incapable of preventing riots, caste



and communal killings, secessionist violence and terrorism. Few Indians expected any government to entirely reverse these trends, but the fact that the Congress(I) lost the electoral support of entire communities almost overnight suggests that the country, by and large, expected any new government to fulfil its basic duties. Punjab, Kashmir and communal eruptions were to the common man evidence of the gradual loss of authority and competence of the Congress government apparatus, and the judiciary.

Prime Minister V P Singh continues to be perceived as a person serious about restoring the authority of the government, but disillusionment with the new government is setting in. The Prime Minister's credibility has suffered the greatest in respect of his Punjab policy, which was launched with great emotional fanfare and promised to end the years of terror. The wooing of Akali Dal leader Simranjeet Singh Mann was initially seen as a master move. And it was felt that V.P. Singh's famous





RAKESH SAHAI



**The government lacks a coherent policy on Kashmir. The state has become the battleground for two ministers—Fernandes and the Mufti**

'healing touch' would complete the miracle

**ALL THAT** is in sad shambles. The Prime Minister has been forced to admit to Parliament that incidents of terrorism have gone up in Punjab during the past four months. Mann, far from turning out to be the enlightened moderate determined to return Punjab to the Indian mainstream, has not even taken oath in Parliament. The National Front government has reacted from pique. Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed has declared that there will be no talks with militants in Punjab and the government's official spokesman has taken to criticising Mann. Just how much things had changed was proved

when V P Singh, in total contrast to his first visit, did not travel in an open jeep during his recent trip to Punjab.

While terrorism continues to make victims of innocent citizens and emboldened militants go to the extent of launching a rocket attack on a TV station, the Prime Minister and the home minister can merely issue futile

warnings. Hari Mohan Dhawan, a Janata Dal MP from Punjab, feels that the government's record in Punjab is lamentable. "The Governor of Punjab is so ill-informed that he was not aware of a massive bomb blast in Batala even hours after its occurrence. How can such a man control the situation in Punjab?" Dhawan's criticisms on this score were not taken kindly by V P Singh, who snubbed Dhawan by saying "If you want to criticise the government, then you can join the Opposition. Why are you in the ruling party?"

**KARUNANIDHI** Has embarrassed the Centre by denigrating the army



**IN KASHMIR**, too, the government is floundering for want of a coherent policy. The most distressing part is that Kashmir seems to have become the battleground for two powerful National Front ministers—George Fernandes, who has been given special charge of Kashmir, and home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Fernandes dropped a bombshell last week by declaring that the results of police and administrative actions in Kashmir



were not commensurate with the effort put in. He claimed that the only solution was to re-establish political processes in Kashmir. A powerful lobby within the government, with the tacit support of Fernandes, is also clamouring for J&K Governor Jagmohan's dismissal.

The Mufti and his powerful friends, Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammad Khan, are, however, equally determined to ensure that Jagmohan stays. Arif Mohammad Khan says that Jagmohan is doing a good job in Kashmir and he should not be removed. "In fact, there ought to be no interference in his work." The Mufti sounds equally complacent in claiming that there has been "a breakthrough" in Kashmir. He feels that the situation there is gradually being brought under control and that "there is no need to start political processes at this stage. First we require a firm hand, and only later can we start political processes."

But the government does have a credibility problem in Kashmir, especially after the murders of Srinagar University vice-chancellor and the HMT general manager. The regime's detractors were quick to point out that the government had released five dreaded terrorists in exchange for the Mufti's daughter, Rubaiya, but in the case of the vice-chancellor and the HMT manager did not bother to do the same. The killings caused an outrage. Arif Mohammad Khan was stoned at a public meeting. Ajit Singh and Fernandes were chased by angry mobs, and the slain HMT manager's son angrily threw aside the wreath sent by V.P. Singh.

The Mufti today claims that the government was negotiating for the release of the two men but the Pakistan-based chief of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Amanullah Khan, in the meantime, issued their death verdict.

**IN OTHER** states too, there is growing unrest. The most recent example is Assam, where a Janata Dal ally, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), is hanging on tenuously to power. Intelligence reports have suggested that certain AGP leaders have links with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a terrorist outfit. Some media reports from New Delhi alleged that the Centre was so worried about the AGP's inability to deal with growing terrorism that it was considering the imposition of President's Rule in Assam. This was, however, later denied by home minister Sayeed. Janata Dal insiders point out that the Centre is in a dilemma since it cannot destabilise its allies.

Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi knows this and has embarrassed the Centre by denigrating the Indian Army and championing the greater Tamil cause. Intelligence re-

ports claim that the wily chief minister, faced with growing loss of popular support, has decided to play the parochial card. LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) guerrillas, who were not so long ago killing Indian soldiers, are reported to have been allowed into Tamil Nadu and there is talk of a greater Tamil homeland. The Centre is aware of these ominous developments, but appears powerless to do anything about them. "The government is under pressure from different parties and segments and it is doubtful whether it will be able to last for very long," says the Congress(I)'s P. Shiv Shankar, adding "I would have wished the government to complete its tenure because for a nation to be stable its government has to be strong and purposeful."

**THE COMMUNAL** situation presents an equally bleak picture. In the past five months, riots have broken out in different parts of Gujarat, Navada, Jamshedpur, Kanpur, Allahabad, Jaipur and Hazaribag. The National Front's powerful allies are clearly concerned. "We are worried about growing communal violence," says CPI(M) MP Subhashini Ali. "If the government cannot take effective steps, communal conflagrations could become a nationwide problem."



**M**ann, far from turning out to be the enlightened moderate determined to return Punjab to the Indian mainstream, has not even taken oath in Parliament



But home minister Sayeed is correct in pointing out that communal and other forms of violence are endemic to certain parts and in any case not the creation of the National Front regime. However, the government believes that societal violence can be contained and has sent out the message that it will deal strongly with offenders. "It is a matter of credibility," argues the young Janata Dal minister of state (agriculture) from Bihar, Nitish Kumar. "Communal riots would occur during the Congress(I) regime too but people, especially the minorities, began to feel that the Congress(I) was not really interested in safeguarding them." Today, he says, people at the lowest level are beginning to feel that the National Front government is more sincere.

In Bihar, for instance, the Dal chief minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has publicly announced that the officials of the district administration will be held responsible for any failure on the law and order front, and has given them a free hand in curbing any kind of violence. UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has gone one step further by arresting the Shankaracharya of Dwarka, threatening his supporters and declaring that he will not hesitate to arrest anyone who tries to perform the *shilanyas* at the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid site. The UP chief minister's bold move has hammered home the message that the government is supreme and not hostage to the demands of any one community. This is the first step towards restoring the credibility of administrative processes and the rule of law.



## CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS

### GRADE: A

**T**he concentration of central powers that marked the Congress years ended with V.P. Singh's election to the country's highest office. This change stemmed not merely from the fact that a number of powerful political parties at the state level—the DMK, the CPI(M) and the Telugu Desam—were V.P. Singh's political allies, but also from the realisation that the fabric of Indian politics was changing. "State governments are not the stooges of the



Centre," says K.C. Tyagi, the Janata Dal MP from Ghazrabad (UP). "It is no longer possible to rule this country through force. The National Front government is a reflection of the state of national politics: we can only rule through consensus," adds Nitish Kumar, the minister of state for agriculture. "Our government is responding to the inherent drive of the system, we have to change basic policies, including Centre-state relations, if for no other reason than because of our need to survive politically," says textiles minister Sharad Yadav.

Tyagi, Kumar and Yadav are relatively young grassroots politicians with little experience of palace politics and without the upper class values of many of Rajiv Gandhi's cronies. At the same time, however, they best articulate the country's changing political structure. Tyagi feels that maximum power should be given to the states because the democratic process has created regional urges. He feels that regional chauvinism cannot be curbed by threats and force, but by allowing states greater control over their destinies and a chance to fulfil their aspirations. "The more the Centre concentrates its powers at the expense of the states, the faster the forces of separatism will grow," he warns.

V.P. Singh has already demonstrated that states will henceforth be treated as equals and not as lowly local powers. The new government is plan-

ning to establish a constitutionally protected Inter-States Council; the National Development Council (NDC) will be given a bigger status, while the Planning Commission will be reduced to merely an executive body subservient to the NDC. State governments all over the country are pleased that V.P. Singh's actions till now have shown that he intends to keep his promises in this area.

At the same time, bringing about concrete changes in Centre-state relations will pose a major challenge to the National Front government in the future. For, the job of balancing regional aspirations with separatist tendencies cannot but test any government. And secondly, satisfying regional aspirations will also require hard cash. Will the new government ever be able to garner the requisite resources? The problem is that in the ultimate analysis, everything hinges on these two pre-requisites: resources and political skill.

Whether Prime Minister V.P. Singh makes the grade or not might be anything but clear, and in the end, history might consign him to the heap of political failures. But on one count he will never be judged harshly: nobody will ever be able to fault him for not determining what the challenges to the Indian polity are. •

**Indranil Banerjee with Rajiv Shukla/  
New Delhi**

**P**owerful political allies at the state level, such as the CPI(M) in WB, have spurred the Front to decentralise



# Prisoner of God

*Shankaracharya Swaroopanand's arrest by the UP government creates a storm*

**H**e might have been dismissed as yet another "spiritual crank" or a "political puppet". But the nationwide furor over the arrest and detention of Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Dwarka, by the Uttar Pradesh government indicates that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is no longer the exclusive preserve of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The Supreme Court has asked the UP government to explain on what grounds the seer had been arrested, based on two writ petitions which alleged that the move was mala fide and illegal. In fact in Allahabad the legal fraternity went on a lightning strike on 3 May to protest against the monk's arrest. In Varanasi the Shankaracharya's followers blocked traffic all over the city, while certain religious heads in Gujarat have asked the management of temples in the state to observe a day's token strike.

When Shankaracharya first gave the call to perform the *shilanyas* afresh at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya sometime in early February, he was probably the last person to expect the issue to generate such a controversy. The VHP was riding high on the crest of the success of its own programme in November last year. The triumph of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the BJP's close ally, both in the Parliamentary and Assembly elections was another morale booster for the organisation - it meant that it was as much in a position to call the shots with the newly-elected government as it was with the previous regime. And sure enough the VHP posed the first serious threat to the National Front government by announcing its decision to construct the Ram Temple on 14 February. The government wriggled

out of the situation by playing upon the VHP's patriotic fervour in the light of the Kashmir problem and Pakistan's supposed involvement in it. The VHP granted the government four months to review the issue.

But that decision has cost the VHP dearly. It is now being perceived as a paper tiger given more to making periodic noises about the issues it has raised rather than displaying a sustained ideological commitment. It has also been embroiled in charges of misusing funds in the name of the temple. The sole objective of the week long *dharam jagaran yatra* (religious awakening tour) undertaken by the VHP in mid-April was to clear these misconceptions.

Swami Swaroopanand couldn't have bargained for a more opportune time to launch his counter movement. Under the banner of the All India Sanatan Dharam Pratidindi Sammelan, the Shankaracharya opened an office in Ayodhya during Ram Navami in March this year, and camped

**The Shankaracharya had said in an interview that former PM Rajiv Gandhi was always in favour of constructing a temple at the disputed site**

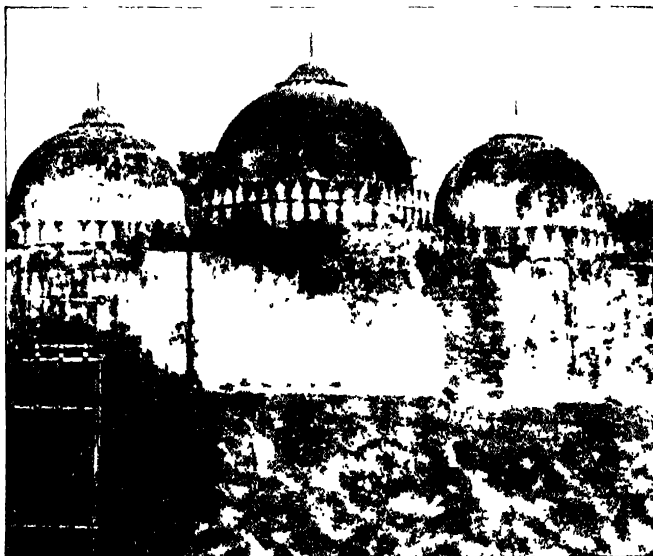


there for about ten days. His disciples claimed that he won the support of most of the leading *mahants* and *sadhus* of Ayodhya barring those staunchly committed to the VHP like Nritya Gopal Das and Ram Chander Das Paramhans. Prominent among those who rallied behind Swaroopanand were Swami Ram Saran, the Lakshman Kiladeesh who is also president of the Ayodhya unit of the Ram Janmabhoomi Punarudhar Samiti, and Mahant Madhavacharya, the convenor of this Samiti. The reasons given by the Shankaracharya for the fresh *shilanyas* is not convincing enough. But his tone threatens to be more aggressive than the VHP's. Swaroopanand had, in fact, alleged that all devout Hindus have been let down by the VHP because the *shilany-*





JAGDISH YADAV



(Clockwise from far left) The Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth: creating a furore; the VHP's *shilanyas* at Ayodhya: whipping up passions; the Babri Masjid: at the centre of a controversy

Further in the interview, while comparing V.P. Singh with Rajiv Gandhi, Swaroopanand said the latter was always in favour of constructing a temple at the disputed site. "He had sent Buta Singh to me and had assured that the final decision would go in favour of the Hindus. After all, didn't the *shilanyas* take place in Rajiv's time?"

Once he'd established his base in Ayodhya, the Shankaracharya undertook a religious awakening trip similar to the one the VHP had launched. With the four symbolic bricks he had collected from Varanasi, the Shankaracharya and his men had planned to reach the banks of the Sarayu river in Ayodhya on 7 May, before proceeding to the disputed site. The UP government decided to take precautionary measures on 28 April itself. The Faizabad district administration was directed to arrest Swaroopanand and his disciples on the river bed itself, and if any tension persisted, to allow only the head priest inside the temple for the day and not permit visitors inside. But on 30 April the Shankaracharya was arrested along with ten others in Phulpur township of Azamgarh district in

as was performed 152 feet away from the actual birthplace of Rama. Further, according to him, the VHP has "no right to build the temple, since the *nirmohi akhra* (the owners of the disputed plot of land) had delegated this authority to representatives of the *sanatan dharma* (Hindu religion). The VHP has Jains, Buddhists and Arya Samajis among its members, people who don't worship idols." The other contentious point, according to the religious head, is that the *shilanyas* for temples dedicated to gods like Rama and Vishnu should always be performed when the sun was in its *uttarayan* phase (over the northern hemisphere) and not in the *dakshinayan* phase as was done during the *shilanyas* in November last year. The Shankaracharya also criticised the VHP for

politicising the issue.

Regarding Swaroopanand's last charge, the VHP maintains that the Shankaracharya himself has been propped up by the Congress(I) — an allegation repeated by the CPI MP Gita Mukherji in the Lok Sabha putting the Congress on the defensive. In a recent interview to Lucknow's Hindi daily, *Navbharat Times*, Swaroopanand denied "his links with the Congress(I) but said he had the backing of the RSS. Significantly enough, he then gave himself away when he said that the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had sent an emissary, Gargi Shankar Mishra, to him to seek his "blessings" before the temple gates were opened in February 1986. "I told Mishra this should have been done long ago," said the Shankaracharya.

apprehension of alleged breach of peace, and later taken to the Chunar fort.

Perhaps the most unexpected reaction to the arrest has come from the VHP — the Shankaracharya was poohpooched by the organisation as a "*sarkari sadhu*," who had a track record of dancing to the tune of the party in power. The fallout of the episode is that even if the VHP had ideas of going ahead with the construction of the Ram Temple, it will do nothing of the sort now. Why give the Shankaracharya yet another handle to chafe at an organisation whose credibility is a little low at the moment? In the meantime, Swaroopanand's followers are determined to go ahead with the proposed *shilanyas*. •

**Radhika Ramaseshan/Lucknow**



# The Hindu divided

## The Ram-Kasturi dispute breaks out once again

**F**or a while, it appeared as if the 'truce' would hold. When *The Hindu's* associate editor N. Ram and editor G. Kasturi settled their differences in November last year after a flaming row over the discontinuation of the former's Bofors exposés, it was believed that the worst was over.

Even though Kasturi and Ram (uncle and nephew) hadn't exactly kissed and made up, there was reason to believe that their quarrel—which had threatened to become a family feud and jeopardise the future of south India's number one newspaper—was sufficiently patched up from erupting once again. After all, the two had arrived at what seemed to be a comprehensive settlement. And then, they had pointedly refrained from attacking each other, resulting in their dispute being quickly forgotten. Says a *Hindu* editorial staffer, "We were relieved and went back to work thinking 'all's well that ends well'."

Only, it hadn't quite ended. Mid-last month, Ram surprised almost everyone by writing a strongly-worded 15-page letter of complaint to the Press Council of India, which amounted to a virtual indictment of his uncle and editor Kasturi. And then to most everybody's amazement, filed a petition in court that sought the removal of Kasturi from *The Hindu's* board of directors. Says the same *Hindu* staffer, "Now, we feel that the battle has just begun."

In his letter to the Press Council, Ram contended that the Bofors stories, which he and the paper's Geneva

correspondent Chitra Subramaniam had filed since October last, were either killed or manipulated. Accompanied by five annexures to establish this, the letter charged Kasturi with

- "Suppression of freedom of the press and the systematic violation of professional and ethical norms."
- "The complete denial" of Ram's role and his rights as the paper's associate editor.
- Using his clout with the family—some of who are on *The Hindu's* editorial board despite having "very little experience in journalism"—to destroy independent and ethical enquiry.

The most important provocation for Ram's letter appears to have been the spiking of a Bofors exclusive filed by Chitra Subramaniam early last month. He alleges that the story was killed on the orders of his brother N. Ravi, who was recently promoted from deputy editor to associate editor (with executive powers), thus superseding Ram in

There were also other grievances. According to the fiery Marxist news-hound (who is a card-carrying member of the CPI(M)), the editorial desk has a standing order to publish nothing on Bofors (not even agency stories) unless they are cleared by one of the Kasturi-Ravi team. Moreover, he thinks that a number of Bofors exclusives co-authored by Subramaniam and him were underplayed. For example, the 10 March article titled 'The Ramesh Sharma-Bachchan connection'. It was tucked away on page nine of the newspaper even though, by his reckoning, it deserved to be splashed on page one.

**K**asturi allowed a PII story on Ram's complaint to the Press Council to be carried in *The Hindu*, although as a short single column piece on an inside page. (Predictably, the *Indian Express* gave it a four-column spread and dealt with the letter in great detail.) But he couldn't have guessed that his irrepressible nephew was planning to take him to court. The petition (to which Ram's mother Mrs. Narasimhan and his other brother N. Murali, *The Hindu's* general manager, were signatories) filed in the Madras High Court charged Kasturi with mismanaging the paper and trying to misuse his majority share-holding to oust them from the organisation. Apart from demanding Kasturi's dismissal from the paper's editorial board, the petitioners pleaded that he be prevented from taking action against them.

On 2 May, Justice S. Janarthanam ruled

to restrain Kasturi from either chairing meetings of the newspaper's board or expanding its size. He also observed that *The Hindu's* editor should not interfere with the duties of the other directors of the board. However, he disallowed the petition-

## THE ADVERSARIES



N. Ram (left) and G. Kasturi: matters have reached a stage where it is going to be difficult to arrive at any compromise

the newspaper's hierarchy. Ram claims that Ravi had stated that nothing by Chitra Subramaniam would be carried in *The Hindu* unless she explained why an earlier story of hers was sent to the *Indian Express* for publication.



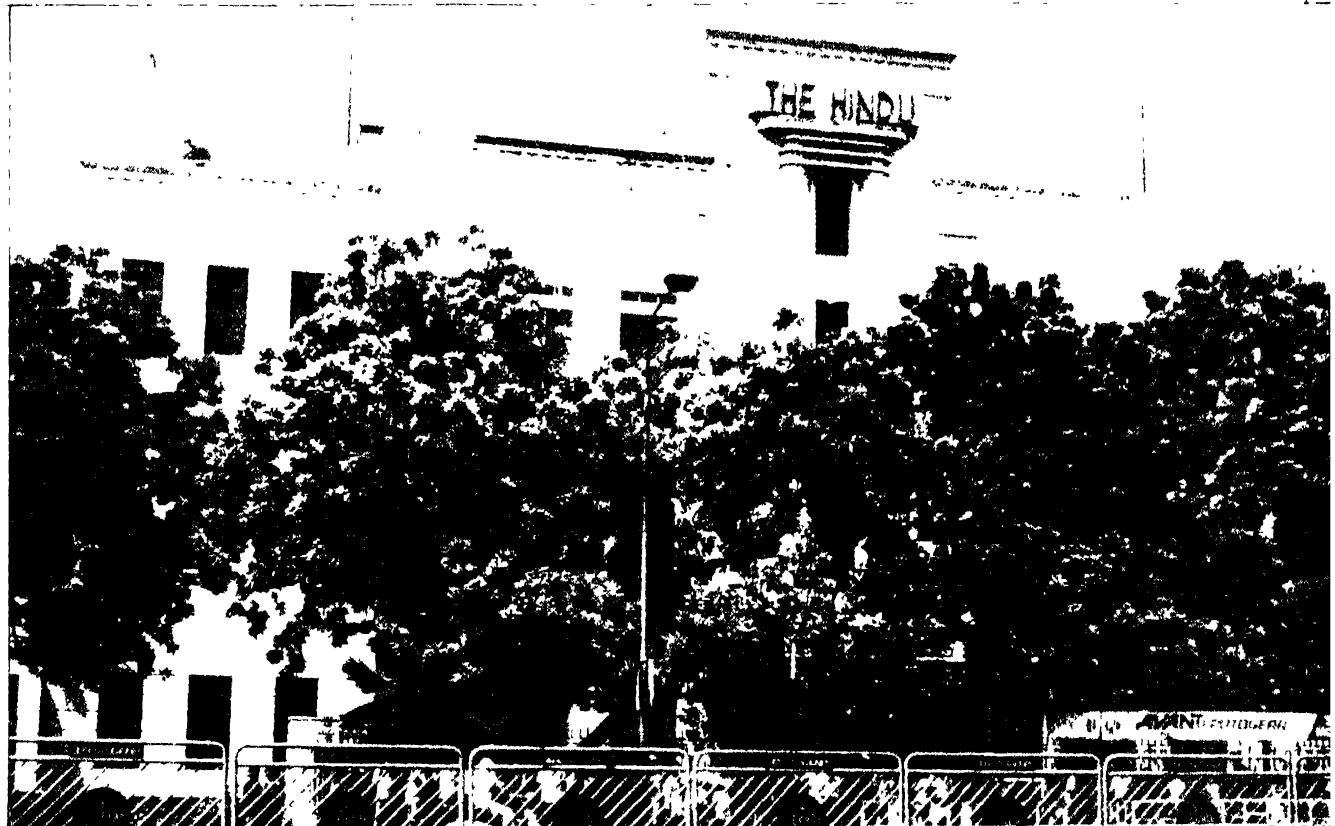
# family

ers' plea that the "next senior-most member" (or S. Rangarajan, *The Hindu's* printer and publisher) be allowed to chair board meetings in Kasturi's place. The Justice said that should a board meeting need to be held before the court passes its final verdict (on

the Ram-Kasturi slanging match and the November settlement) was "an act that is prejudicial to the public interest as well as the interest of the company." To Ram's camp, this was vindication of what it had been saying all along.

As for the main plea, it will be taken up only when the court resumes sitting after the summer vacation in June. But, meanwhile, Kasturi and his followers have got down to preparing an appeal against the interim orders of

ches, his supporters counter that this is far from true. According to one, Subramaniam began sending her copy directly to Ram and not—as she ought to have done—to the news editor K. Narayanan; and that Ram—perhaps to avoid the embarrassment of having them cleared for publication—began handing her articles to the *Indian Express*. "Ram hijacked Chitra's stories and passed them on to other newspapers. Which editor would sit back and watch an exclusive being given away? After all, Chitra



The Mount Road office of *The Hindu*: vitiated atmosphere

T. HAMAMMOORTHY

the question of Kasturi's ouster), the petitioners could move the court once again for further orders.

If the petitioners were delighted, it was not only because the court had granted virtually everything short of their main plea—the sack of Kasturi. But that the Justice had agreed with their contention that Kasturi's decision to discontinue the publication of the second instalment of Bofors revelations last year (which led to

**The dispute raises an interesting question. Are an editor's powers to kill, play down or delay the publication of a story absolute?**

J. marthanam, which they propose to file before the vacation bench. It is possible that the matter will remain with the courts for a long while unless both parties agree to an out-of-court settlement.

**A**s for the main reason for the quarrel erupting once again (the spiking of Subramaniam's story), it is not very clear what exactly happened. Although Ram has charged that Kasturi had imposed a ban on her despat-

had got them by using the resources of *The Hindu*, he says. The Ram camp, however, says that such stories are being advanced only to hide the fact that Kasturi resorted to censorship.

Whatever the truth, the dispute raises an interesting question about the discretion an editor enjoys. Are his powers—to delay the publication of, to kill or to play down a story—absolute? Yes, say some of Kasturi's supporters, who argue that this is a universally accepted convention in the newspaper world. Says one "Ram has no right, for example, to demand that his story be carried on page one. This kind of thing is up to the editor—it is a matter that doesn't touch on loss of freedom and the other things he is



# Ram's October Revolution

*It still remains unfinished in May*

**T**he differences between G Kasturi and N Ram first broke out in October last year when the former, without so much as a warning, discontinued the second and further instalments of a series of articles on the Bofors scandal. Kasturi claimed that the decision was taken because he felt that the stories (by Ram and Subramaniam) threw little additional light on the scam.

This led an enraged Ram to fly to Delhi, where, at a packed press conference, he denounced Kasturi for sabotaging independent journalism and succumbing to political pressure. Then, he distributed copies of the stories that were killed

to select newspapers all over the country.

Kasturi retaliated by threatening to take disciplinary action against Ram. If this did not transpire, it was because *The Hindu's* four-member editorial board split two-

two on the question. At the time, it appeared as if the Ram-Kasturi row would divide *The Hindu* family and destroy the newspaper. But a little later the two reached a settlement and the dispute slipped quickly from the public mind.

Under the terms of the agreement, Kasturi agreed to drop disciplinary proceedings against Ram. In turn, Kasturi was allowed to expand *The Hindu's* editorial board by taking in three members of the family.

One of them was Ram's younger brother Ravi, who has sided with Kasturi in the current squabble. Recently, Ravi was promoted to the rank of associate editor—which makes him the number two man after Kasturi in *The Hindu's* editorial pecking order.

It was believed then that no more would be heard about the Ram-Kasturi tangle. Not quite so soon anyway.



talking about."

But Ram, clearly, believes otherwise and he appears to have found some support in the remarks of Justice Janarthanam, who observed that Kasturi acted against the public interest and that of his paper by not carrying the Bofors stories last October. Says a Kasturi follower: "This is a remarkable observation. It is difficult to say what exactly public interest means in this context."

The Kasturi camp also charges Ram with being inconsistent. It points out that during his outburst last October, Ram had accused Kasturi of killing the Bofors stories because of political pressure. And that now—since that explanation can no longer hold with the change of government—he has resorted to charging him with personal vendetta. "It's Kasturi who's been

consistent all the while. He has always maintained that the stories on Bofors would be carried only if they amounted to something," says a camp follower.

As things stand now, matters appear to have reached a stage where

it is going to be difficult to arrive at the kind of compromise that was made last November. While it is impossible to say how the courts or the Press Council will rule, the Kasturi-Ravi combine commands about 55 per cent of the Hindu Group's share-holding and is likely to have an edge if the battle is reduced to a boardroom war. (The Ram-Murali camp owns only 17 per cent and the Rangarajan group, which has adopted a more or less neutral attitude, possesses 25 per cent.)

But either way, the real loser will be *The Hindu*. Already, the newspaper has lost its best-known investigative reporter. Chitra Subramaniam sent in a terse one-line letter of resignation last month after her newspaper didn't carry her story. The atmosphere at the newspaper's Mount Road office is tense, with journalists worried about the possible repercussions of the tussle in the management. Says a senior editorial staffer: "This time the squabble appears really serious. Heaven help *The Hindu*." •

**R. Bhagwan Singh / Madras**

**Chitra Subramaniam: a question of ethics**





# Miscarriage of justice

*Was the life imprisonment sentence on P.M. Antony unjustified?*

It's been four years since the Malayalam version of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation Of Christ* was staged in Kerala. Called *Christuvinte Aaraam Thirumurivu*, the play, produced by noted playwright P.M. Antony and his Alleppy-based Suryakanti Theatres, had a controversial opening. Even before the first performance, the script was confiscated and Antony placed under arrest. The director, however, got a High Court injunction and managed to stage the play in a few towns.

*Christuvinte Aaraam Thirumurivu* ran to packed houses, but also created a major law and order problem for the state government, with Christians taking to the streets to protest the blasphemous show which attempted to humanise Christ. Antony did nothing to improve matters, publicising the play as one about "Christ who is not the son of God, Judas who is not a traitor and Mary Magdalene who is also not a sinner".

The Karunakaran government banned the play with an eye on the forthcoming Assembly elections. Antony went to court, but both the Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court appeared to agree with the Congress(I) government in this instance. But there was hope yet: the Marxists insisted that if they came to power they would lift the ban.

The Marxists won the 1987 poll, but failed to deliver on their promise. Instead, they concentrated on wooing the Christian bishops over to their side. And there wasn't much that Antony could do as, by 1989, he was languishing in Trivandrum Central Jail on murder charges.

Somarajan, a powerful landlord and coir factory owner had been murdered by suspected Naxalites in Kanjinghar village near Alleppy, on 29 March,

1980. In the first information report (FIR) filed, there was no mention of Antony, a well-known Naxalite sympathiser, in the list of 27 assailants. But a few months later, the playwright's name was added on. Antony came to know of this only when he was summoned before the sessions court of Alleppy in connection with the Somarajan murder. The chargesheet said that Antony was among the people who raided the landowner's residence; but he didn't actually go inside to commit the murder. The artiste

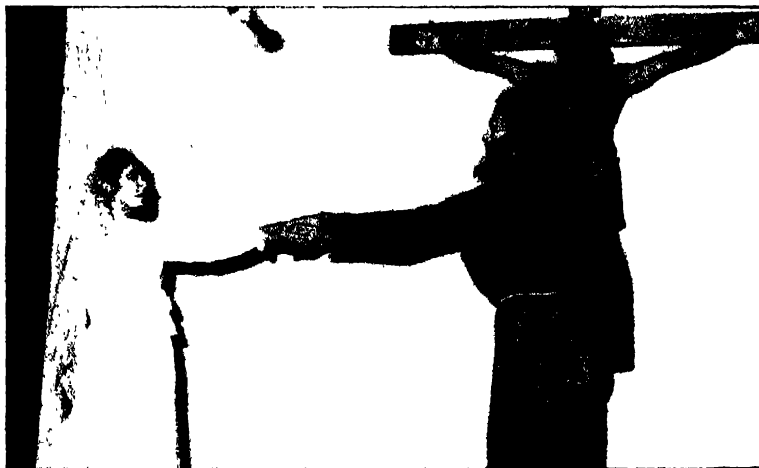
*umurivu* had created a major controversy in the state. The prosecution produced a number of witnesses against Antony—all of them Christians—and proved his complicity to the court's satisfaction. The judgement of the sessions court was overruled and Antony, along with 21 others, was sentenced to life imprisonment. The judgement was welcomed by the Church, with a high-ranking bishop describing it as "God-sent" punishment for the anti-Christ author. But most others believed that Antony had been framed, as just retribution for his anti-Christian plays.

And sure enough, with its leading light behind bars, Suryakanti Theatres was hard put to stay in the business. The company lost nearly Rs one lakh in creating sets and costumes for *Christuvinte Aaraam Thirumurivu*, which they could stage in only 24 centres out of a probable 250 in Kerala. There is an unofficial ban on their performing in Church-owned auditoriums and in temple grounds.

Antony, for his part, maintains: "I have been more sinned against than sinning. The Church has launched a witch-hunt against me and the Marxists who were supporting me when they were in Opposition are today hand-in-glove with the Church."

From his cell in Trivandrum Central Jail, Antony has now petitioned the Supreme Court, through noted lawyer, and former chief justice of Kerala High Court, Subramaniam Potti (who is fighting the case free of charge). And until the highest court in the land pronounces its judgement, Antony will remain behind bars. Though he does manage to get out every three months on parole, to keep his theatre company going. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Alleppy and Trivandrum**



A scene from *Christuvinte Aaraam Thirumurivu*: anti-Christ?

was, however, granted anticipatory bail by the court.

Antony had a cast-iron alibi: on the night that Somarajan was murdered he had been performing a street play before a 300-strong audience at the Thivrathassery temple grounds, about 16 kms from the scene of the crime. But when he told defence lawyers that he could bring witnesses who would say this in court, his solicitors asked him not to bother. The case against him, they said, was too weak to stand up in court. Antony believed them—mistakenly, as it turned out.

In 1985, the Alleppy sessions court sentenced 16 of the 28 accused to life imprisonment, while Antony got away with six months. The case went up to the Kerala High Court in 1986, by which time *Christuvinte Aaraam Thir-*



# Change of place

*The Dal government shifts culture from the human resource development to the information and broadcasting ministry*



A number of high-profile artists are getting agitated over the move to shift culture out of the ministry of human resource development and into the information and broadcasting ministry.

Anything to do with the culture bashes of the old regime is up for scrutiny and comment, but what should be done instead has not been spelt out.

It is typical of the esoteric cultural clan that it should pronounce what should and should not be "done" about culture—not very different from the attitude of Jayakar and aides who thought they were the arch deacons and high priestesses of the show. Everyone seems to forget that culture isn't a package to be handed out like industrial licences or agricultural loans. It is the creation of an environment which will let all forms of art thrive, flourish, evolve and spread. High-profile artists and bureaucrats cannot get together and, to put it crudely, "create" culture.

The I&B ministry is being seen as an extension of the song and drama division of old. The culture clan fears that the minister in charge will line them up to go by train to perform for the troops, or in one-horse towns. Or that they will have to vie for time with Chunky Pandey and Sridevi on the idiot box.

Perhaps the song and drama division of the government has always appeared moribund, but Doordarshan has certainly shown that it has immense sophistication, selectivity and aesthetic know-how, if it is in the right hands, and is allowed to function independently and professionally. The fear that culture will now emerge only through the TV screen, and everyone will be measured by the Hindi film yardstick, is surely misplaced.

There is no logic in maintaining that culture issues will get con-

taminated by putting them in the same ministry that looks after broadcasting, and the dissemination of information, i.e. news, views and entertainment. It would be like saying that if handicrafts and handlooms were to be brought into the ministry of industry it would be contaminated by the big mills. Both handicrafts and handlooms are, and have been, promoted as part of our cultural heritage and yet have been looked after by the textiles ministry and not by the ministry of human resource development, which handles culture. There is no consistency in the allocation of certain subjects to certain ministries, and it is high time that a reassessment of this was done. The criterion should be its co-relation with the overall area of concern, and harmony with related areas, and not the whims and interests of those who are close to the powers-that-be.

Take Pupul Jayakar and the departments looking after handlooms and handicrafts, for instance. Mrs Jayakar has always viewed the decorative and elitist part of village crafts as some-

thing connected with trade and exports only, and not as rural industry with tremendous potential for employment and domestic markets. It was always exports, museums, commerce, festivals and "culture" at its most high-brow, where folk artists of India performed for the great leaders of the world, and all the lords and ladies gathered to give India's heritage a clap. Pre-1977, Mrs Jayakar presided over 'Crafts as Commerce', building the Handicrafts & Handlooms Export Corporation with its branches at prime spots all over the world. It is another matter that today this organisation stands with no long-term plan, riddled with corruption and having miles to go.

**W**ith the Janata government of 1977 came the shifting of handicrafts and handlooms to the ministry of industry from that of commerce, and the exit of Mrs Jayakar. As part of village industry, handicrafts and handlooms received support from the newly created district industry centres, massive handloom expos all over the





country and protection through reservation items for the cottage sector. Crafts and hand-made textiles were not to be encroached upon by small industry which in turn was not to be smothered by large industry. Village crafts, whether it was the ordinary leather *chappal* or earthen *kullar*, were to receive support along with the more fancy products made for middle and upper class drawing rooms. This seemed a cohesive and harmonious way of dealing with industries, both hand and machine varieties.

With the return of Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Jayakar in 1980, handicrafts and handlooms once again moved back to the commerce ministry and then to the new ministry of textiles. Elitist handicrafts were developed here while common crafts remained under village industry, Khadi Boards etc., still

under the industry ministry. The development commissioner for handlooms was conveniently given charge of the Festivals of India which were managed by the human resource development ministry and controlled by Mrs Jayakar.

There is no reason to fear that the use of television, radio, stage and screen to propagate news, views and cultural

programmes would necessarily encroach upon and harm the other important aspects of cultural development, such as the proper care of museums, avenues for the growth of classical and folk art forms as well as their proper documentation and research.

The various National Cultural Zonal Centres, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, (IGNCA) and IN-TACH are all extra bodies set up at great cost and effort, which are certainly parallel centres of development and authority which we can ill-afford. All the work these organisations do could and should have been done by the institutions already set up by government, or at least should not draw away from genuine developmental requirements at the grass-roots. There has to be a closer look at how these

medium; why museums, cultural academies and institutions to nurture dance, music, art and craft cannot be supported more liberally and why institutions like the National Museum, IGNCA etc., cannot faithfully preserve, research and document, so long as they do not swallow an unnaturally large share of the resources. The IGNCA for instance, has an allocation of Rs 100 crores which appears shockingly overbalanced (what with payments to American architects and the like), compared to funds made available to hundreds of cultural institutions spread across the country. The expertise and money that goes into one institution can surely be shared first with many struggling ventures rather than one high-profile organisation in the capital.

It is, in fact, the same old story of setting up elitist Navodaya Vidyalayas instead of giving better incentives to lakhs of village schools, or decorating Delhi roads while lakhs of kilometres of village roads do not exist, of bringing Marutis in before improving the public transport system and by caring more for the prestige of Pepsi before the needs of thirsty villages. We don't need institutions run on the influence and *firman*s of high priests and priestesses who arrange Festivals or Apna Utsavs on political leaders' birthdays.

The National Front manifesto briefly touched on what its cultural policy will be. It indicated that support would be given to people's efforts and that a diversified and decentralised approach would prevail. It is quite merciful, that not much more has been said, because it would then be committing the same folly as the Congress (I) government of handing down a culture package from on high. Mani Shankar Aiyar has been known to remark that this government knows nothing about culture and that he would be laying out his version of the perfect cultural policy. But for all those who found the Festivals and Utsavs a bit much, they should be thankful that this government's view on culture is that people should have their own views.

If there is an enlightened minister and a progressive policy in which it is understood that the pre-requisite for cultural forms to flourish is to have contented people, the shifting of such an amorphous and abstract subject like culture from one ministry to another should hardly make a difference. ●

**Pupul Jayakar never viewed village crafts as rural industry. It was always exports, museums, festivals and "culture" at its most high-brow**



institutions are working, particularly in the context of overlapping of mandates and projects and consequent pressure on the same resources. The zonal cultural centres arrange cultural performances of the people of the region, which in my childhood was done by the song and drama division of the information & broadcasting ministry! If they are actually funding small diverse grass-root efforts and reviving and developing local art forms, then fine, why can't they continue to do so even if they are brought into the I&B ministry?

**T**here is no reason why television and radio cannot serve as an instructive, sensitive and entertaining







## PARTY WARS

After the Circulation Wars, the Party Wars. Two weeks ago, two of India's best-selling glossy magazines decided to throw parties in the same city—on the same night!

The major extravaganza was the *Cine Blitz* party which took over Bombay's China Garden, the Piano Bar and their parking lots. A cast of thousands starred and virtually the entire film industry showed up. Anil Kapoor was drunk, Shabana Azmi was talkative, Simi looked forlorn, Rishi Kapoor was ebullient and Shekhar Kapur was the best-looking man present. Sanjay Khan, still not fully recovered



**At the *Cine Blitz* (above) and *Society* party: celebrity turnout**

from his accident, drew the biggest crowds.

A mere five-minute drive away, *Society*, the glossy *Stardust* sister, was throwing its own party. This was a high-life affair where Sunita Pitamber and Parmeshwar Godrej were friends, Dr Russey Soonawalla

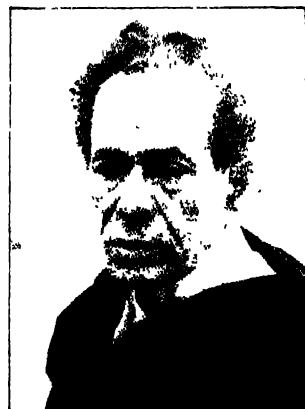
was star, Alyque Padamsee and Mohammad Khan talked shop and Simi looked even more forlorn.

Which was the bigger success? Difficult to say because *Society* publisher Nari Hira threw a smaller party while the *Cine Blitz* show was a Cecil B. De Mille extravaganza.

There were some common elements, though. The Bachchans went to both parties as part of their 'welcome to the world' drive. And noted drunk and extremely large person Vinod Khanna first snapped at journos at the *Stardust* party before getting into a full-fledged fight at the *Cine Blitz* bash.

## FLAT DENIAL

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is, obviously, no respecter of persons. No, not even of Habib Tanvir. Hence, the eminent theatre person and his troupe of Chhatisgarhi artistes were summarily asked to vacate the DDA quarters which had been home to them for years on end.



**Habib Tanvir: home away from home**

Tanvir was allotted the two-room flat in 1979 by the then vice-chairman of the DDA, Mahesh Buch, who wished to help an artiste in distress. (Tanvir had had to give up his South Avenue MP's flat when his Rajya Sabha term expired.) The arrangement was, however, never regularised and now Tanvir and his group are seen as illegal occupants. The DDA wants them out, and even cut off water and electricity supply for a while to get its message across.

But Tanvir and Co. are still in residence. And will, apparently, vacate only to move into the *maidan* behind their present quarters, and build their own homes.



## ONLY SHETTY

Her music company insists that she's the Indian Aretha Franklin, who's going to wow the *desi* pop scene before she's through.

Perhaps. But Shweta Shetty certainly has the makings of a teenage icon, if her first-ever cassette *Going Wild* is anything to go by. "I am a teenager now, no problems *yaar*," warbles the sultry singer, whose life crusade is to "reach out and touch the life of all



Shweta Shetty: no problems, *yaar*

teenagers" (So what if Shetty herself is all of 23?)

It all began with ad jingles for such products as Tree-top, Brylcream, and Vimal. Then came the odd musical *Godspell* and *Best Of Broadway* among them. Until, Shetty was finally snapped up by CBS Gramophone Records and

Tapes (India) Ltd.

Not without familial opposition, though. Her conservative father was dead against a career in music. Explains Shweta: "You know, one thing leads to another. It means trips out of town, shows and, if things go wrong, even a film."

But it certainly beats the hell out of crooning "Only Vimal" after a dozen leggy creatures have done with "expressing" themselves in one of a woman's many ways.

## OVER THE HILLS

The punishment posting wasn't long in coming. No sooner was the Wadhwa report indicting Kiran Bedi off the front-page when the police officer was presented with transfer orders. Currently serving a stint with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), superintendent Bedi was asked to move to Mizoram.

Utterly unfazed,

**Kiran Bedi: transferred out**

Kiran professed to be overjoyed at the development. She's travelled a lot in the north-east, and Mizoram was just the place for her.

But Bedi had her say before taking off for the hills, calling for an overall review of the powers of the police in handling law and order problems in the light of the Wadhwa report. "The issues involved are much above us as individuals," she said.

Even if they are transferred to Mizoram.

## KING KHAN

He seems to have made a habit of winning this one. And so, nobody was too surprised when Pakistani squash player Jahangir Khan walked off with the British Open title. This was his ninth consecutive tournament win, and Khan celebrated the victory by going on his knees at the Wembley Conference Centre court, his exultant face raised heavenwards.

Over the years Jahangir has established his reputation as a record-breaker. He held the World Open title for six years, before losing to Australian Geoff Hunt in 1981. This defeat only made him an even more determined opponent, and Khan remained undefeated for all of 500 international matches over a period of five-and-a-half years.

Said a beaming Khan



Jahangir Khan: squashing all opposition

after the British Open: "This was my best in nine years. I won without dropping a tournament. I have shown that when I want to win I can find the fitness and reserves to do so." ●



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

# The minister and the messiah

*K.P. Unnikrishnan is out, but Pitroda hangs on*

*"I don't believe in messiahs"*  
K.P. Unnikrishnan, December 1989  
*"That is the minister's privilege."*  
Sam Pitroda, January 1990

**T**he appointment of Janeshwar Mishra as the minister of state for communications brings to an end a bitter—and in many ways, bizarre—conflict between a man who denied he was a messiah, and a minister who insisted he acted like one. A battle between two heavyweights, their egos and their aspirations: K.P. Unnikrishnan, who was the communications minister till last fortnight (he is still the minister for surface transport), and Satyen 'Sam' Gangaram Pitroda, Rajiv Gandhi's favourite technocrat, a man of many technology missions, and the country's controversial telecom-munications messiah.

"I don't believe in messiahs," declared Unnikrishnan in an interview to SUNDAY last December, barely days after assuming office, in one sentence running down Pitroda and everything he stood for. That was his first salvo, which he followed up by accusing Pitroda of using his office to grant favours to his family-run concerns in the US, falling short of promises made by Pitroda's brainchild, the Centre for the Development of Telematics (C-DoT), to deliver automatic exchanges for India's beleaguered and over-stretched telephone network, for being inefficient, and moreover, for being rude. Ever since Pitroda was a couple of minutes late in welcoming Unnikrishnan on the minister's first day at work (never mind that he had the prescribed bouquet of flowers with him), the portly minister has never really forgiven the Gujarati telecom expert with his unruly hair and

clipped Van Dyke. Pitroda was more circumspect, he denied all of Unnikrishnan's allegations, only saying that it was the minister's "privilege" to think and do anything he wished. He also maintained that he was delayed in his welcome because he had a VIP ("whom I simply could not ask to go away") in his Sanchar Bhavan suite of offices at the time.

In spite of Unnikrishnan's charges questioning Pitroda's efficacy in all things telecom, and Pitroda's denials, it was apparent that the battle was really one of personalities and not so much about a keen minister worrying about his portfolio, or a telecom secretary (in addition, Pitroda is chairman of the telecom commission) defending his actions. Perhaps both combatants even misjudged each other. Like most people, Pitroda probably thought that Unnikrishnan was just another unschooled politician who



**K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN:** In his haste to gun for Pitroda, he forgot to cover his own base



**SAM PITRODA:** The telecom whiz-kid reigns supreme—for the moment



was made his minister by something of a coincidence. And what could he, having spent the past decade in political obscurity downing lavish lunches at gourmet Chinese restaurants, know about telecom? A bad move, and a dangerous presumption. Unnikrishnan, in fact, is intelligent, and *does* take interest in his work.

Unnikrishnan, for his part, may have misjudged Pitroda equally badly: an overblown personality who reached the top with a lot of media hype and Rajiv Gandhi's patronage, an over-the-hill character who had lost his base with the change in government. Wrong, again. Unnikrishnan has lost the war, and his portfolio. But Pitroda—besides losing his sleep and the five technology missions the Raja took away from him—has lost none of his telecom verve.

Mirroring the clash, almost all of urban India was divided into two camps, the ones who believed that the minister was unnecessarily gunning for a good man because Rajiv had put him on a pedestal (even giving Pitroda a certificate for his contribution to India), and others, who believed that Sam's only contribution to the development of Indian telecommunications and his sole claim to fame was bragging endlessly ("We have done in three years what the telecom department could not do in thirty", "We have revived India's scientific talent", "C-DoT's exchanges match the best in the world," etc.) This was a glaring contrast to the image Pitroda had built up, of a struggling youngster from Baroda who made it big in the US and had returned home, humbly, to serve the country of his birth and make it technologically advanced—all for a token salary of one rupee a year.

**F**or a while, it looked as if there was no way that Pitroda could pull through. Several bureaucratic heads rolled the day V.P. Singh took over last December. It seemed that Pitroda might have to resign because of his proximity to Rajiv Gandhi. Predictably, Unnikrishnan denies this, defending his government's much-touted—and much-battered—claim that the Raja's durbar would not be vindictive. If it was as simple as that, he says, Sam would have faced the guillotine on day one of the new government. And no ego hassles, either. "There can be a clash of egos between two equals," says Unnikrishnan righteously. "How can this be a ego-clash when we are not at the same level?"

## C-DoT busting

### CHARGES AGAINST PITRODA

- Failed to deliver the Main Automatic Exchange on time.

- Failed to instal the Rural Automatic Exchange all over India.

- Imported US \$50,000 worth of telecom equipment from Martek Inc., a company run by Pitroda's family in the US.

- Bragging endlessly.

- He is what he is because of Rajiv Gandhi's patronage, and no thanks to Pitroda's telecom expertise.

- The Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) is capable of producing good electronic exchanges, but Pitroda has constantly downplayed its efforts to promote C-DoT.

- C-DoT cannot deliver, and the only option is to go in for Alcatel technology wholesale.

### THE DEFENCE

- A small design problem. Expected when developing a technology from scratch.

- Ditto

- No big deal. Only a small fraction of the company's US \$ one million a day sales.

- Not bragging. Backed by competence. One of the few people in India who really understands telecom.

- Ditto

- It is not. If ITI could produce electronic exchanges, it would have done so even before Pitroda created C-DoT.

- Bunkum. Alcatel is keen on a contract killing with its outmoded systems. C-DoT is the key to an electronically networked India.

Pitroda appears to be in the clear, with V P. Singh having swallowed a large part of his defence. But he still has to explain the purchase orders from Chicago-based Martek Inc. If he cannot do it satisfactorily, he may have to resign. Pitroda has the backing of the C-DoT staff, but even they may find that protecting someone guilty of nepotism against the Raja's ire is simply not worth it.

This is not a personality clash." He adds: "In a parliamentary set-up, a secretary is a secretary, and a minister is a minister. So there is no question of a witch-hunt."

And yet, to the rest of the world, it seemed just that, despite Unnikrishnan's vague defence. A hunt conceived by the minister and his cronies to oust the telecom whiz-kid. Besides the almost daily—and pompous—ranting that became a regular feature of Unnikrishnan's role as communications minister (once, a surface transport ministry press conference turned into the minister's diatribe against Sam), the hunt led on to a technical audit of C-DoT. As Unnikrishnan tells it, he asked Pitroda for figures to show the development and production of C-DoT telephone exchanges, and was aghast to find that despite his prom-

ises, Sam had failed to deliver the goods. Reason enough, says the minister, to order a technical audit. He insists. "This was not the first time that a technical audit was ordered. Even the Indian Council for Agricultural Research, which was responsible for heralding in the green revolution in the country, had a technical audit some decades ago. So why not C-DoT?" The minister has a point. C-DoT's promised main automatic exchange, a hi-tech package which can handle 16,000 or more telephone conversations at a time, is still at the prototype stage. And the organisation's smaller rural automatic exchanges, which Pitroda said he would flood the country with, are only used in some government offices and in a handful of districts. Pitroda is dismissive about this shortcoming: "If you

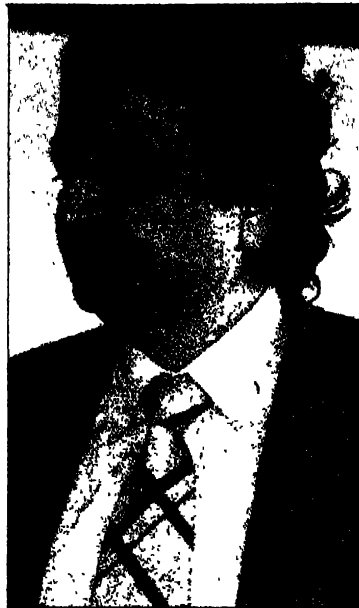


can wait 30 years for a domestic (electronic) exchange, you can wait three more." Which, of course, is not much of a defence.

Unnikrishnan claims that he did nothing without consulting the Raja. And that he had the tacit support of some cabinet colleagues. Industry minister Ajit Singh, for example, told SUNDAY in an interview in end-December that his government was "not bothered about people like Sam Pitroda per se. If he has some good ideas he might be useful. But the kind of political clout some of these people had attained was uncalled for." This may have sounded like a death sentence for Pitroda. Certainly, Unnikrishnan interpreted it as such. And then, because Sam would not kow-tow to him, the minister pushed the C-DoT audit as if his political career depended on it. (Ultimately it did, joke wags.) And by most counts, went it alone.

First, he instituted a 13-member enquiry panel, chaired by former electronics secretary K.P.P. Nambiar, his very own man, a buddy from his home state Kerala. Interestingly enough, Nambiar was on Pitroda's side of the fence about three years ago, when they together fought former telecom secretary D.K. Sangal—a solidly pro-imports and anti-Pitroda man—on the grounds that C-DoT technology was good enough for the country. The committee embarked on a hatchet job, completely ignoring Pitroda, and submitted a report to the Union Cabinet two weeks ago (the report is expected to be tabled before Parliament, but with Unnikrishnan's exit, this could be a dud). Dissenters were dealt with harshly. A prominent one was C-DoT executive director G.B. Meemanshi, who was given the sack. End of Pitroda, thought most observers.

Only, they—and the Unnikrishnan bandwagon—had not counted on the clout that Pitroda could draw upon. In the first weeks of the new government, Pitroda was a regular visitor to the Raja's Lodhi Estate residence. The relationship they struck up then,



**V.P. SINGH AND VINOD PANDE:** The Prime Minister and his cabinet secretary backed Pitroda

say political observers, helped Pitroda tide over the worst of the Unnikrishnan tirade. In addition, he ducked the press, the same medium he so loved—and used—at the height of his prominence in the Rajiv years. Instead, he—through a band of loyal C-DoT engineers—did the rounds of newspaper offices in New Delhi to present his side of the story to journalists. It is not that Sam prefers to lie low, or stop shooting his mouth off. Very early on in the battle, say insiders, cabinet secretary Vinod Pande had warned him to keep his mouth shut. Just stay quiet and out of the limelight, he counselled, hold off and all will be well. The advice paid off, and some Prime Minister's Office officials say that it was Pande's prodding that led to Unnikrishnan losing his communications office. It also helped that B.G. Deshmukh, secretary to the PM, was on Pitroda's side. With the sort of support Pitroda enjoyed, the only way Unnikrishnan could have got rid of him was by filing a charge-sheet against the self-styled telecom czar. Perhaps that was the next step after the enquiry panel's report, but the minister did not last that long.

**T**here is also a murkier, and less talked about reason which could have led to Unnikrishnan's ouster from the ministry: greed. The minister's primary reason for a hatchet job

on Pitroda and C-DoT, say telecom observers, was not that he thought a domestic effort in developing electronic telephone exchange would fail, but because he wanted imports. And quickly. For years, multinational giants—French company Alcatel, Sweden's Ericsson Aktiebolaget, Japan's Fujitsu, West German firm Siemens AG, AT & T and Bell Labs of the US—have been pining for a big break in India's estimated Rs 15,000 crore telecom market. And supplying exchanges with all the spare parts is considered to be the way in. Till now, foreign entry has been generally restricted to small exchanges and joint sector

ventures which manufacture telephone instruments.

The name that figures most is Alcatel's. The French company has already landed a bonanza of sorts: it makes 512 line E-10B exchanges at a 500,000-lines-a-year facility in Manikpur, Uttar Pradesh. But it desperately wants a second factory in Bangalore, which Pitroda has stalled for the past five years. Stumped by Pitroda, Alcatel tried its hand by recruiting Gandhi administration favourites, the brothers Hinduja, as its agents for India, but the 10 per cent operators failed in their attempt. Pitroda had convinced Rajiv Gandhi that C-DoT was India's only hope. With a change in administration, the best bet for the multinational was getting friendly with Unnikrishnan, say insiders, which would in one stroke land them the Bangalore project (and all subsequent projects, as it is easier to service a single technology) and remove the czar, its persistent nemesis.

Obviously, the move did not work. The Raja, possibly keeping in mind his crusade to expose kickbacks in deals and generally painting his administration white, thought that even a hint of a kickback scandal involving one of his senior ministers would spell doom for his already shaky reign.

In the end, though, it is likely that Unnikrishnan's character brought him down: he behaved far too much like a



Congress(I) man, an ilk he has shunned for the past decade. Very simply: lord over everyone, including your secretary. Only, in the Raja's regime, the cabinet secretary holds as much—if not more—sway than a minister. What senior secretaries like Pande and Deshmukh say is the law. And always, always, be discreet. Never

appear to be vindictive. Unnikrishnan may have tried his best, but in reality, he never had a chance. As far as this government is concerned, the artful messiah spells a winner, and an overreaching, clumsy minister an embarrassment. •

**Sudeep Chakravarti and Shiraz Siddhva/ New Delhi**

## INTERVIEW

## "Profit is no longer a bad word"

*Russi Mody on government policy, Tata power struggles, his retirement and more*

*Chairman and managing director of India's largest company, avid aviator, forthright speaker, hands-on manager, pianist, culinary expert and hard task master Rustomji Hormusji 'Russi' Mody, 72, is all that and more. He has completed a half-century of service with Tata Iron & Steel Co. (TISCO)—starting out as a shop-floor trainee in 1939, and becoming CMD in 1984. Mody is one of India's top managers. He has never been known to mince words, but in conversation with SUNDAY in Calcutta last week, the doughty steel specialist seemed a little subdued—especially about government policies and his old nemesis and currently Prime Minister of India, V.P. Singh. Excerpts from the interview.*

**SUNDAY:** Fifty years is a long time in one company. Didn't you ever want to move to another company?

**Russi Mody:** I have had ideas once or twice during my lifetime, but they all came to nothing. And I can see the hand of providence in this—I am supremely happy in having spent 50 years in this company.

**Q:** When did you think of leaving?

**A:** I certainly did not want to leave after 1962. I think 1962 was the last time that I had some ideas (that) I was a little frustrated, as indeed it happens to everyone in a long career.

**Q:** Everyone sets goals for himself. Did you?

**A:** I have always wanted to be the managing director of TISCO. I achieved that in 1974. Whatever has happened to me subsequently was not of my seeking.

**Q:** Is anything unfinished?

**A:** Everything is unfinished. In fact, if I had ever thought in terms of finishing something, then I would be mentally dead a long time ago. There is only one thing final in life, and that is life itself.

**Q:** Any regrets?

**A:** There are many things in my life

that I might have done differently, but overall, with the kind of life that I have led, how can there possibly be any regrets? God above and my fellow human beings on earth have been so good to me that it would be almost a shameful act on my part to have any regrets.

**Q:** You have also had your share of problems. TISCO was on V.P. Singh's excise black list. All proposals for expansion and modernisation were held up for two-and-a-half years. How was this impasse solved?

**A:** Oh yes, I have had many a turbulent period. For instance, even if I didn't want to leave the company, my bosses wanted to fire me.

**Q:** When?

**A:** After 1962, my career has been a smooth one. The first 16 years were good years, a mixture of fun and work. Thereafter, for about seven years, I was struggling, and the last 28 years have been very pleasant. In fact, I had been told by a *pyotshi* that I would go through a seven year period when nothing would go right and that is exactly what happened.



**Russi Mody, chairman and managing director TISCO**

**Q:** We were talking about your excise problems and the government holding up your company's proposals...

**A:** I do not believe in compromising with what I believe is wrong. Maybe other people saw it differently. They believed they were right and I was wrong.



**Q: But a sort of settlement was made, the proposals were finally cleared.**

**A:** Yes, it was an acceptable and honourable settlement and not an extortionist settlement. In fact, the settlement was made much later, after V P Singh had left the finance ministry (in the Rajiv Gandhi administration). The (excise) case is still going on.

**Q: You have always advocated decontrol of price and distribution in the steel industry. Recently, the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) has picked up the refrain. Do you think a policy change is in the offing?**

**A:** I really do not know the answer to that. It can only happen if the government wakes up to the realities of the

realised that the country's future resources must come from the earnings of the public sector and it is also realised that merely achieving the commanding heights of the economy means nothing unless the economy is an efficient one. Each industrial unit in the public sector is making an effort to improve and the greatest change that has taken place is that profit is no longer considered to be a bad word, and that profit is probably the only criterion for judging the efficiency of an unit. For instance, Mr S Krishnamurthy, the retiring chief of SAIL, has brought about a complete change in the work ethos of SAIL.

**Q: What changes have you brought**

ness. This is something that can never be finished. In fact, it can get better and better.

**Q: There is a feeling that TISCO fell behind. The modernisation programme should have started much earlier...**

**A:** We didn't have the money to do so. But I agree that it should have started much earlier. However, I don't believe in crying over spilt milk. We have now set upon a course of modernisation which will certainly make Tata Steel a very efficient and modern unit. By 1993-94.

**Q: Would there be an increase in capacity?**

**A:** Well, around five million tonnes (a year) by 2000 AD. These are my projections, the government has not asked me or anything like that.

**Q: There is this perennial comparison between the performance of SAIL and TISCO. A Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices report says that TISCO has some in-built advantages. For instance, TISCO has its own collieries. On the other hand, SAIL has a "host of interferences that blunt its commercial edge".**

**A:** So far as mines and collieries are concerned, I do believe it is an advantage to have one's own mines. But the fact that SAIL don't have theirs is due to a lack of this realisation on the part of the government. It is entirely open to the government to allot a certain number of coking coal collieries to various SAIL plants just as we have done. But vested interests have prevented this from happening.

**Q: Despite excellent relations with the West Bengal government, there has been very little investment in the state by TISCO.**

**A:** I have recently sent a proposal to the West Bengal government for starting a blast furnace complex that might ultimately lead to a steel plant in years to come. This is an investment of around Rs 30 crores. Tata Davy's workshop is in West Bengal, our bearings division is in West Bengal, our commercial activities are all in Calcutta.

**Q: TISCO's experience with acquired companies has not been all that good. Please comment.**

**A:** I think our experience has been very good. Let me name you the companies that were sick and we have revived them into flourishing and



**"I have had many a turbulent period. For instance... my bosses wanted to fire me"**

**"There is no reason why Jamshedpur should not have its dissidents"**

economic situation and since they do not consult me on the subject, I wouldn't know. But it is certainly desirable. In our country today, there should be only three types of control - fiscal control, import control and environmental control. All other controls are antiquated and are only tools for exercising bureaucratic authority and power.

**Q: A number of changes have taken place in the public sector. How do you view them?**

**A:** I think in the public sector the changes are for the better. All around, there is a greater awareness that the public sector has to be more efficient if it has to perform the functions for which it was set up. It is now being

about in TISCO?

**A:** Having spent 50 years in Tata Steel, I have gone through the various stages of managerial development. Almost from the days of American general managers, and through the decades of management of the company by Indian executives, I had always felt that a manager ruled rather than led. And I always wanted to change that. I felt that the fundamental change that was required was that people should not be afraid of management. That the fear complex should disappear and that truly democratic values of discussion should be introduced. I would not claim absolute success in this goal of mine, but considerable progress has certainly been made. You asked me earlier if I had any unfinished busi-



prosperous companies. In some cases, we have merged them into divisions of existing companies. For example, the Indian Tube Co., Tinplate Company of India, Special Steel Ltd, Ahmedabad Advance, then NICCO (National Insulated Cable Co.) (The) bearings (division) has made a profit for the first time this year. Most of them are out of the woods. Kumardhubi Engineering is still faltering, Tata Davy is not doing too well.

**Q: What about the future of the Tata Group?**

**A:** Bright

**Q: There was a lot of talk about a power struggle at the top. Is this true?**

**A:** Absolutely no power struggle at all. If and when Mr J.R.D. Tata retires, the board of Tata Sons will meet and elect a new chairman. Present indications are that the chairman will be Mr Ratan Tata, who is being groomed for the position. He is a very fine man and I will have no difficulty in working with him.

**Q: Would you say that talk of a conflict is just speculation?**

**A:** Created by interested parties. I really don't know where these rumours come from, but these are largely mentioned by the press. In a sense, the interested parties are the press. If you talk of a smooth succession, it makes no news. If you talk of a power struggle, it makes news.

**Q: There is criticism about how Jamshedpur (TISCO's home base) is run. It is felt that TISCO runs it with an iron hand and there is no room for disagreements. Do you agree?**

**A:** There is no reason why Jamshedpur should not have its dissidents.

**Q: Isn't disagreement with TISCO frowned upon?**

**A:** This is not true at all. I always tell people "speak up, but don't be disruptive". Just as you want to be heard, you must hear the voice of the majority. And if the majority decides in one way, then the minority must learn to accept the decision. But it is a paternalistic society.

People only miss Jamshedpur when they move out of that city.

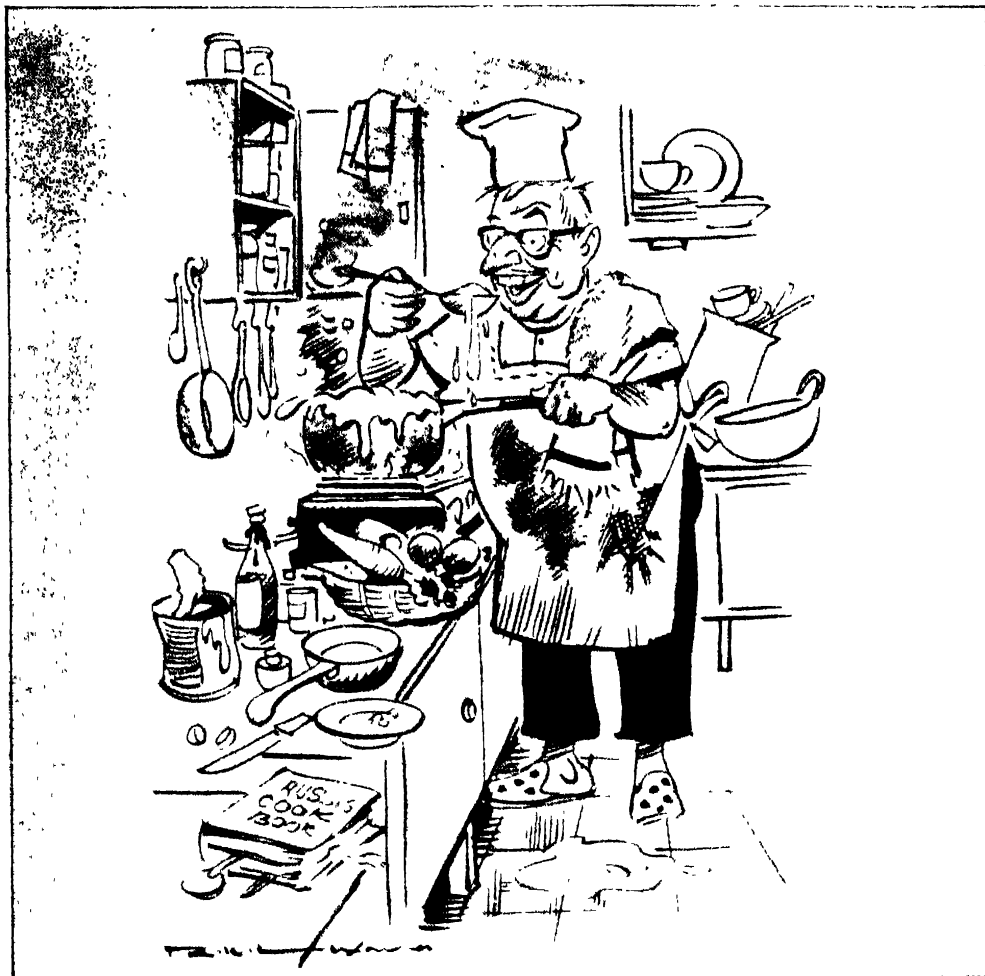
**Q: There is a saying that nothing grows under a banyan tree. Has the planning for your successor gone through smoothly?**

**A:** (Laughs) I have been called all sorts of things in my life, but never a tree. As a matter of fact, I am not a banyan tree since all my executive directors who are on the board of the

company, all function independently. Whilst I keep myself abreast as much as I can with their activities—and that is not always very easy—I think we are all growing very nicely, all the branches of the banyan tree.

**Q: There is some talk about you retiring. What would you do afterwards?**

**A:** Certainly not produce steel. If and when my time comes, as it must come to everybody, and if my health permits, there won't be a dull moment in my life. There are so many things I



R.K. LAXMAN/RUS'S MODY: GLIMPSES OF A LEGEND

**“If my health permits, there won't be a dull moment in my life... There are so many things I want to do... Cooking, for instance”**

want to do for which I don't find time at the moment.

**Q: Such as?**

**A:** Cooking, for instance. Playing games, reading, playing the piano, playing cards. I have so many activities that I won't have a dull moment.

**Q: Do you still have 12-egg omelettes for breakfast?**

**A:** Yes I do. Well, I had ten (eggs) this morning.

**Interviewed by Debjani Sinha**



## INVESTIGATION

# Custom-made trouble

*Sleuths question Reliance imports and duty evasion*

**T**he Union government is all set to open a new front in its ongoing battle with Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL). Customs House in Bombay is now adding final touches to a voluminous show-cause notice to the company, alleging that it surreptitiously imported a purified terephthalic acid (PTA) plant of capacity much higher

its outdated—and perhaps less effective—substitute. Reliance is the only private sector manufacturer of paraxylene in the country.

The show-cause notice on the PTA plant, which is likely to be served on the Ambanis of Reliance, is the belated result of an investigation that began in late 1986, when customs offi-

the law did not permit such enquiries till the imports were over. It may be a coincidence, but finance minister V P Singh had been shifted to the defence ministry by then, while Dhirubhai Ambani, the Reliance chief, had managed to empathise with Rajiv Gandhi.

This time round, the Bombay customs, led by principal collector A M. Sinha, went by the book. They waited till the last consignment for the PTA plant arrived late last year. S Dutt Mazumdar, additional collector of customs in charge of investigation, revived the enquiry in January. Last week, Mazumdar and other officers inspected the Patalganga plant on an 18-hour notice, measuring equipment dimensions, noting down batch numbers of components and taking random printouts of production data. Re-



**The customs case, say Reliance insiders, is clearly a vendetta against Dhirubhai Ambani...**

**...And Nusli Wadia is said to have initiated it, by presenting the government with a document detailing Dhirubhai's misdeeds**



than what had been shown in documents. PTA is the source material for polyester filament yarn (PFY), which is woven into fabric. Reliance's PFY plant is also mired in controversy. Customs authorities approached the appellate tribunal earlier this year, alleging that the company had "smuggled in" four extra spinning mills.

The PTA factory, located at Patalganga in Raigad district, Maharashtra, is the computerised, fully modern flagship of the Reliance empire. Built into it is a plant for the manufacture of paraxylene, a crucial intermediate product in a chain of chemical reactions which converts the feedstock, raw naphtha, into PTA. Paraxylene can be worked into both PTA and DMT,

which started tracking Reliance consignments arriving at Bombay port from the UK. The plant, supplied by British contractors John Brown, is based on a technology from UK chemicals giant ICI. (The technology for the paraxylene plant originates from Universal Oil Products of the US.)

Sukumar Mukhopadhyay, the then collector of customs, who had authored the original show-cause notice on the Reliance PFY plant too, recorded that some of the equipment imported for the PTA plant, particularly the giant compressors, could be of a much higher capacity than declared in the import application. However, the investigation was stalled in February 1987 on the ground that

liance officials, predictably, did not sign on the inspection documents.

The customs' case revolves around three pivotal points.

- The PTA plant was originally licensed for 75,000 tonnes per annum, and imports of plant and equipment worth around Rs 125 crores were made on that basis. But going by periodic enhancement of licensed capacity or "re-endorsement", allowed by the government, as well as records of end-use, Reliance had actually brought in a much larger plant, maybe twice the size for which it paid duty.

- The paraxylene plant is a conundrum by itself. The original import licence does not mention it as a para-



xylene plant *per se* but as a raw material handling equipment and an intermediate plant. In other words, it was imported as a captive plant for production which strictly tallies with Reliance's PTA output. For 75,000 tonnes of PTA, the commensurate quantity of paraxylene works out to 50,000 tonnes. However, customs officials found that Reliance was making much more paraxylene (90,000 tonnes a year, going by the company's balance sheets for last year), so much more that it was even selling the chemical to its arch-rival, Bombay Dyeing, which has a DMI plant without a



**BOMBAYITE:** The Raja is definitely vindictive as far as his finance minister appears more level-headed

built-in raw material factory. The customs, therefore, feel that Reliance has an extra production facility for paraxylene for which duty has not been paid.

- The customs have questioned the steam generation equipment imports by Reliance for the PTA plant, covering many items including a 'turbo-alternator'—a gas-powered thermal power plant big enough to light up, say, Karol Bagh in West Delhi. Reliance said it got the plant free (covered in the licensed value), but the customs would not believe it as there is no concept of a free lunch in business. Hence, pay up the duty.

Sources in the revenue department at New Delhi point out that the show-cause notice may slap on Reliance a duty evasion penalty of Rs 100 crores,

including the compensation for project benefits it had wrongly acquired. Besides, there may be a colossal amount imposed as fines, in lieu of confiscation of goods, and a personal penalty.

The Reliance lobby, entrenched in both business and political circles, feels that the new customs investigation was spawned by a 17-page *aide-memoire* given by Nushi Wadia, Bombay Dyeing's chairman, to the government on 18 January. Reliance is desperately seeking a political reason for the investigation, alluding to the close links Wadia had with Prime Minister V.P. Singh. Last week P. Chidambaram, Reliance's counsel for the PFY case, who is also a former Congress(I) minister of state for home, wrote to finance minister Madhu Dandavate

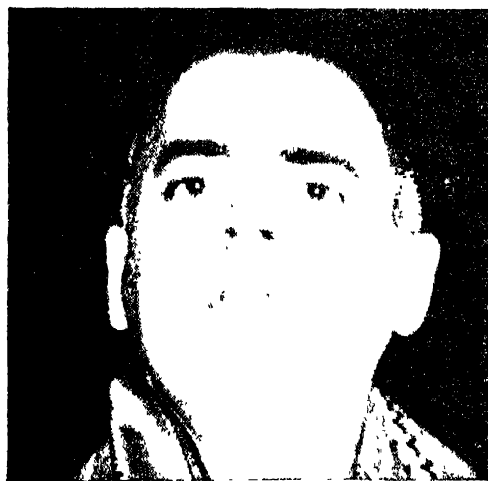
alleging that the customs case on the PTA plant was woven around the Wadia papers. In effect, it was a vendetta against Dhirubhai.

Be that as it may, the fact is that irrespective of the previous pro-Ambani government, a clutch of officials was keeping a close vigil on the activities of Reliance right through the Rajiv era. They were scouting for evidence to bolster their contention at an opportune time, to pin down their assertion that the Ambani empire is indeed built on misdeclared assets and underpaid invoices.

The customs investigation comes close on the heels of the government muscling into Larsen & Toubro (L&T), the engineering giant the Ambanis acquired in 1988, helped by questionable share transfers

from financial institutions (Dhirubhai resigned as L&T chairman, and his son Mukesh as vice-chairman last month, but the Ambanis retain four seats on the board of directors, besides L&T equity held by them). Even a 1985 Letter of Credit fiddle by the Ambanis is under investigation. With the Ambanis under scrutiny, and with the Raja hell-bent on their destruction, the question is: when the going gets tough, can the tough get going? Looking at the Ambanis' past record in fighting back, that is a distinct possibility. •

**Sumit Mitra/Bombay**



**RAJIV GANDHI AND P. CHIDAMBARAM:** The former PM helped out with pro-Ambani policies. And the former home minister is arguing Dhirubhai's case



## ■ Tata trouble?

Ratan Tata's *bet noir* is back. This time, with the legitimate tag of working president of the TELCO Kamgar Sanghatana (TKS) in the company's Pune factory Rajan Nair's election as TKS chief in 1988 was opposed by rival trade union leaders, contested by the TELCO management and it even brought work to a complete halt at the company's factory for weeks as Nair and a group of his loyalists went on a hunger-strike to push his claim. But the management finally broke the strike, signalling an end to the firebrand union leader's aspirations to emerge as top labour boss in the Pune industrial belt. But a Pune industrial court has now upheld Nair's election as TKS president. That is a



**Rajan Nair: resurgent**

step up for Nair, and a step back for Tata. Unless the TELCO chairman accepts the fact that he is stuck with Nair, and that playing along with ambitious union leaders can ensure a fat profit margin, Tata and TELCO may face labour trouble as quickly as they got rid of it last time.

## ■ Smoke and fire

To clamp down on industrial pollution, you need a firebrand, no matter that she shoots her mouth off, acts like the

**STOCK QUOTE**

**"He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me..."**

*A nervous Bombay industrialist, trying to figure out—only half-joking—where he stands with Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh*



**Maneka Gandhi: breathing fire**

world is coming to an end tomorrow, and stomps over anyone who doesn't listen to her. India's industrialists and government planners now have to contend with Maneka Gandhi, the environment minister with the green dreams. Gandhi now says that every project will have to be okayed by her ministry before it does its rounds in other ministries. "I know there will be stiff resistance to this," says the minister. There will be. Earlier, an industrialist could simply clear a project from an

obliging babu or two at the ministries of finance and industry—or the Prime Minister's Office—before approaching the generally ignored environment ministry. On the other hand, business bosses may not complain too much. Last week, the UK announced £50 million in aid to energy efficient projects. Add some similar deals in the future to Gandhi's no-nonsense approach, and Indian industries could actually undo some of the damage they have caused all these years.

## CONTROVERSY OF THE WEEK

### To fly or not to fly the Airbus A320



It is clear, say the government and civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan, that pilot error led to the Indian Airlines (IA) A320 crash at Bangalore in February. But the government has still not officially released the findings of the crash enquiry team, and IA's 15 remaining A320s are still on the ground. The grapevine says that the Raja isn't ready to let the aircraft off the hook. But this decision is costing IA crores in lost revenue, besides irritating the powerful Khan. In end-April, the Delhi High Court admitted a writ petition to get the planes flying, blaming Khan for their grounding. A legal wrangle, and the Raja's strange attitude, could precipitate a problem at the top.

## ■ Red stars rising

Well, five stars, actually. Decidedly Marxist but *perestroika*-struck Kerala is in for a burst of luxury hotel management and building, if chief minister E. K. Nayanar and industry minister K. R. Gowri have their way. The two met representatives of the Taj Group of hotels in Trivandrum, to negotiate leasing out state-run hotels such as the Island Hotel-Bolghatty Palace in Cochin, and the Samudra in Kovalam. The Oberoi chain and Welcomgroup, ITC Ltd's hotel division, have also shown interest in Kerala. 20 plots of prime land—of which 10



**K.R. Gowri: going five star**

are slated for the Taj, say government insiders—between Trivandrum in the south to Kasargod in the north are to be allocated for luxury hotel projects. Even Krishna Nair of Bombay's Leela Kempinski, Nayanar's buddy who hosts the chief minister whenever he is in Bombay, is in the running. Obviously the Marxists feel that they, like their comrades in West Bengal, can shake off the red rhetoric and invite top businesses to the industry and tourism starved state.



# Unfinished journey

*ABSU president Upendranath Brahma passes away*



ASSAM

U p e n d r a n a t h Brahma, president of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), was fighting a losing battle against an invincible enemy cancer. On 2 May, Brahma, who had been leading the Bodos in tripartite talks with the Centre and the state government of Assam and had raised hopes of a solution to the Bodo problem, succumbed to his illness in Bombay, where he was undergoing treatment.

The passing away of Brahma has once again rendered the future of the Bodos, who are demanding a separate state of their own, uncertain, for Brahma was known for his moderate stand and was working for a solution to the problem. In Brahma's absence, his successor will have to perform a delicate balancing act between the moderates within the ABSU and the more adventurist sections of the student body, if the negotiations are to succeed.

When the ABSU decided on a new course of action and re-elected

Brahma as its president at the Banshbari conference in December 1988, his comrades knew they were to carry on the struggle with an absentee leader. Yet, Brahma had remained their undisputed head and there was no question of a change of guard. In fact, a campaign by a section of the ABSU, suggesting Brahma's replacement had provoked a hostile reaction at the Banshbari conference.

The Banshbari conclave was a watershed in the Bodo movement, in which all non-political demands were dropped and only three out of a 92-point charter were retained. It was at this conference that the ABSU

raised the demand for a separate state for the Bodos by dropping the demand for a Union Territory. In order to achieve this goal, the ABSU also prepared the blueprint of a militant movement against the state government and the Centre.

But of greater significance was the emergence of the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) as the co-sponsors of the movement. Brahma had anticipated a leadership crisis within the ABSU in his absence, especially in view of the increasing clout of the extremist elements, and had, as a countermeasure, inducted

within the ABSU, if he was given the opportunity of playing a more active role.

Upendranath Brahma was available only during the tripartite talks and his approach to the problem was generally appreciated by the Centre as well as by chief minister Mahanta. In Brahma's absence, the BPAC and its president, Karendranath Basumatary, who was the ABSU president between 1983 and 1986 are expected to play the most crucial role in shaping the future of the Bodo movement.

When Brahma flew to Delhi last month from the Tata Memorial Hos-

JAGDISH YADAV



(From left) Mahanta, Paswan and Brahma: the last dialogue

sober and mature elements in the movement's decision-making body.

But despite his efforts, large scale violence and sabotage became the hallmark of the movement. It is widely believed in Assam that the extremists within the ABSU were being aided and instigated by central intelligence agencies during Rajiv Gandhi's rule at the Centre to keep the AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) regime, headed by chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on tenterhooks.

Political observers, however, believe that Brahma would have succeeded in weeding out the agent provocateurs and the mindlessly militant section

pital in Bombay for the tripartite talks, he was fully aware that his end was near. That was one reason why he seemed in a hurry to arrive at a negotiated settlement to the Bodo problem. Formal talks were usually preceded by long discussions and both Union labour and social welfare minister Ram Vilas Paswan and Prafulla Mahanta were surprised by the accommodative spirit of the ABSU leader.

In fact, Brahma had entered into heated arguments with his colleagues who insisted that the question of a separate state for the Bodos be incorporated in the terms of reference of a panel formed at the last tripartite



talks and, persuaded them to work out an administrative, political and legal arrangement for the devolution of power. He was also careful enough to induct three moderates—two from the BPAC and one from the ABSU—into the panel to represent the Bodo movement.

Brahma hailed from a very poor family of Debeigaon village, in Kokrajhar district. His education was more than once interrupted because of his family's abject poverty. As a student in Guwahati University, he witnessed the Assam movement, led by the AASU (All Assam Students Union), and later adopted many of the outfit's tactics. He worked as a teacher for some time and then as a tax official, before he took over the reins of the ABSU from Karendra Basumatary in 1986. It was under Brahma's leadership that the ABSU acquired a mass character.

An astute politician, Brahma gradually isolated the old guards of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) who held sway over the Bodos, and steered the ABSU to a commanding position. On 27 January 1987, he met former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and requested the Centre to grant a Union Territory status to the Bodo-dominated districts of Assam on the plea that the tribals were being discriminated against by the Assamese, and, by that year, formally launched a movement for a separate Bodo homeland.

But when the Centre failed to fulfil the ABSU's demand, Brahma went a step further in December 1988 by demanding complete statehood. Towards the end of his life, however, he seemed to have accepted the fact that a separate state for the Bodos was only a remote possibility, and looked forward to an alternative arrangement.

The middle road that he opted for, however, is fraught with pitfalls. The hawks within the ABSU such as Phukan Chandra Bodo and Pradip Daman were opposed to Brahma's moderate stand and are likely to assert themselves now, and a power struggle with the ABSU cannot be entirely ruled out. The Bodo talks may, therefore, run into rough weather in future and the moderation that Brahma preached towards the end of his life may come to be replaced by extremism as the hardliners, who were waiting in the wings for long, make a frantic bid to hog the limelight. •

**Rabjit Chowdhury/Guwahati**

## Death by fire

*Landlords burn to death a Harijan in V.P. Singh's constituency*



UTTAR  
PRADESH

For some years now, Uttar Pradesh (UP) has been recording the largest number of crimes against Harijans. Atrocities of every conceivable kind—murder, rape, torture, burning and looting of villages and property—are such commonplace occurrences that they are scarcely noticed. But despite the overall apathy, a recent incident, the burning of a Harijan by high caste Thakurs, is threatening to become a national scandal because the tragedy occurred in the Fatehpur constituency represented by Prime Minister V.P. Singh. Despite this, it was largely due to the histrionics demonstrated by Ram Nehore Rakesh, a Congress (I) MP from the state who produced the charred clothes of the victim on 20 April and raised a furore, that the crime came to light. After a stormy debate in the Rajya Sabha initiated by S.S. Ahluwalia, another Congress (I) MP, who led a fact-finding team to look into the episode, the government ordered a magisterial enquiry.

Sattodharampur, the village where the incident occurred, is about 35 km from Fatehpur. With a population of approximately 15,000 comprising Thakurs, Brahmins, Harijans, Yadavs, Mauryas, other castes, and a sprinkling of Muslims, the Thakurs, who are numerically the largest, are also the most powerful socially, economically and politically. They own most of the land and control the *panchayats*. The very topography of the village delineates the caste divisions, a large pond separates the hamlets belonging to the Harijans and Muslims from the *pucca*, comfortable houses owned by the Thakurs. Most of the Harijans are agricultural labourers, subsisting on a daily wage ranging from Rs 3 to Rs 5, unaware, of course, that the minimum wage they are entitled to is Rs 18. A handful of them have managed to migrate to nearby cities and other states in search of gainful employment.

Among them was the victim, Dhanraj, working in a factory in Ludhiana

for the last four years. He had recently come down to the village for his sister's wedding which was to be held in early June. Recounting the incident which took place on 5 April, Ram Khilawan, Dhanraj's brother, said that Dhanraj was working in the field of Thakur Arjun Singh, a big landowner, while his wife was chopping firewood in the vicinity. When Arjun Singh asked Dhanraj to carry some wheat bundles to a grain merchant, the latter refused and proceeded towards his house. On the way, he was summoned by another Thakur, who owned a brick kiln. He asked Dhanraj to unload a cart of coal. While Dhanraj was busy in the task, Arjun Singh reached the spot along with his two grandsons, Raju and Gulab, and prevailed upon him to take the wheat. Dhanraj returned home in the evening after completing the assignment. "At sunset, Raju and Gulab came to our house, and accused Dhanraj of cheating them of Rs 50 from the amount procured from selling the wheat," recalls Ram Khilawan. He adds "Both of us protested, but they forcibly took Dhanraj to their house."

**The victim's sister: traumatised**





Ram Khilawan sent a cousin of his and two other friends behind Dhanraj, but nobody really knows what happened in the Thakur's house, because they stopped a little distance away for fear of being spotted. The cousin who prefers anonymity says, "The next thing I saw was Dhanraj smothered in flames, shouting 'where's the police chowki?' and then he jumped into the pond." Ram Khilawan, who was summoned by some villagers, managed to pull out Dhanraj from the pond. He sought help from a police outpost in the village, but the constable did not even have a vehicle to take the victim to hospital. "By this time about 25 Thakurs including Arjun Singh and his

but I was informed that the two were drunk and misbehaving in the bazar. When I reached the village, some cops said my son had allegedly burnt Dhanraj. But to my surprise I found Raju lying inert in a warehouse opposite my house", he said. Singh summoned a few "eyewitnesses", significantly Thakurs, of course, who testified that Dhanraj had set himself on fire "deliberately near the pond so that the flames could be promptly doused". Before doing so, he had allegedly said, "I will settle Raju right by doing this and landing him in trouble with the police." The eyewitnesses swore that Dhanraj smelt of kerosene, but were curiously silent when asked if he had

sion, the latter maintaining that he had never seen Bindu. Bindu was whisked away to her maternal home by her brother a couple of days after Dhanraj's death.

Strangely Raju and Gulab were not arrested but personally surrendered at a judicial magistrate's court on 11 April, six days after the incident. This, despite a senior police official's claim that policemen were promptly despatched all over Fatehpur district to track down the accused. This official said that the male members of the family were absconding. But Thakur Sumer Singh revealed that both he and his father, Arjun Singh, had all

along been staying in the village while Raju and Gulab admitted that they had sought refuge in their relatives' houses in neighbouring villages but kept returning home periodically "to solicit advice from our elders as to when and where we should surrender." Asks a Haryana leader of the area "Doesn't this show that the administration is keen on a cover up?"

What was the possible intention behind the exercise? The answer



Policemen keep vigil in the disturbed area: late reaction

son Sumer Singh, Raju and Gulab's father had gathered around us," says Khilawan. But they refused to help. "They even threatened the Muslim coachman who offered to help Dhanraj," says a villager. Ram Khilawan went to the police station at Asothar, where the officer in charge arranged to take Dhanraj to Fatehpur for treatment. After this Khilawan filed an FIR.

With the government doctors on strike, Dhanraj was taken to a private nursing home. "He had sustained about 80 per cent burns and despite our best efforts, we couldn't save him," said a doctor. Dhanraj died the next day at 12 noon. Ram Khilawan's account, surprisingly, is refuted by many. According to Sumer Singh, Dhanraj was not working on their land, but had been drinking the whole day along with his son, Raju. "I was in a neighbouring village, Thanaon, that day

poured kerosene on himself or whether it was poured on him.

If Dhanraj had allegedly been burnt down by Raju and Gulab, as Ram Khilawan has stated in his FIR, what was the motive? Ram Khilawan maintained that the dispute centred around the money that Dhanraj was supposed to have swindled. "My brother said he was severely beaten by the Thakurs in the warehouse before being set on fire," he said. But a close relative in whom Dhanraj had confided after being rescued from the pond revealed that Raju, backed by his grandfather Arjun Singh, had ordered Dhanraj and his wife Bindu to live permanently in their house as their servants. "He said your wife will be treated on 'par with my wife and she'll be my mistress. Raju had vehemently protested," said this source. The Thakurs as well as Raju denied this ver-

is that this is the most important parliamentary constituency in India, said a local leader. Congress(I) activists from Fatehpur alleged that V.P. Singh had "close relations" with the family of the accused and that his son Ajeya Singh had held close deliberations with Sumer Singh and Arjun Singh during his election campaigns. Sumer Singh denied this charge, but admitted that he had actively supported the Janata Dal in the last elections. While it may be difficult to prove the nature of V.P. Singh's links with Thakur Arjun Singh and his family, the very fact that the Thakurs comprise a powerful segment of this constituency and that their support is critical for any political candidate from this region, only shows that the enquiry into this murder will not be just and impartial. ●

**Radhika Ramaseshan/Lucknow**



# Anatomy of a strike

*Medical students oppose the move to reserve seats in post-graduate courses*



KERALA

The medical system in Kerala, which is considered to be one of the finest in the country, has been brought to a standstill by striking doctors and medical students. The medicos have gone on an indefinite strike in protest against the government's decision to reserve seats in post-graduate medical courses for teachers of *ayurvedic* and homeopathy colleges so that they can learn modern surgery. The idea behind the reservation policy is to enable *ayurveda* and homeopathy teachers—who must necessarily also possess MBBS degrees in allopathy—to teach the discipline in their own colleges.

But the government's decision, has caused widespread resentment among doctors and students of various medical colleges in the state who feel that admission to post-graduate medical courses would become all the more difficult because of the reservation policy. Moreover, the medicos are also opposing the move, which has been masterminded by the state health minister, Congress(S) strongman A C. Shanmughadas, because they feel that any attempt to make surgeons out of homeopathy and *ayurveda* practitioners, who have no knowledge of the allopathic system of medicine, would lead to a social disaster. But Shanmughadas, a steadfast proponent of the 'integrated' system of medicine, has refused to budge in the face of stiff opposition and the medicos' strike—which ran into more than 50 days at the time of going to press—has crippled the state's medical infrastructure.

The strike has affected hospital services, as clinical work in government hospitals is usually handled by the house surgeons and the post-graduate students. The senior doctors are, therefore, finding it difficult to cope with the workload. The hospital wards, which used to be overcrowded before the strike began, today wear a deserted look, as only emergency cases are being admitted. Moreover,

cases of deaths due to non-availability of doctors at medical college hospitals have also been reported.

The strike has developed into a war of nerves between the doctors and the health minister, who is being fully backed by the Democratic Youth Federation (DYFI), the youth wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M). In Calicut, a parallel out-

patients' department run by the striking medicos was attacked by the DYFI activists. In Trivandrum, the police aggravated the crisis by beating up the striking doctors. For their part, the medicos devised a rather crude way of condemning the health minister, they carried his effigy in a protest demonstration and began stoning it publicly. They also tried to set it on fire, but were prevented from doing so by the police. Even after 50 days of the strike, the mood of the medicos remains sullen. The Joint Action Council of the Medical Students and House Surgeons (JACMSHS) has made it clear that it will not call off the strike till the government withdrew the reservation policy.

The government's decision has revived an old controversy that raged in the state's medical profession during the last two years over attempts at integrating the different systems of medicine. The introduction of an integrated system, based on an interdisciplinary approach with allopathy, homeopathy and *ayurveda* serving as the three components, sparked off widespread agitations in 1988 and 1989. At that time, the stir centred on the question of giving training in the clinical systems of modern medicine to students of *ayurveda* and homeopathy in government hospitals.

The present crisis developed due to

the health minister's insistence that students of *ayurveda* and homeopathy should also be trained in surgery. This has made it necessary for the teachers of *ayurveda* and homeopathy medicine to undergo post-graduate courses in surgery so that they can teach the discipline in their colleges. The point that has been overlooked, however, is that *ayurveda* students are supposed to be taught *salyatantra* (an ancient surgical science) and not surgery *per se*, according to the nationally accepted syllabus of *ayurvedic* medicine. The question that is being asked by the striking doctors is how *ayurveda* students—who are not familiar with the science of allopathy—can hope to be trained in surgery.



Doctors with the health minister's effigy: Incensed

The government's response to these conflicting contentions has been hardly constructive. It was in 1987 that the issue first surfaced though *salyatantra* was introduced as part of the *ayurveda* syllabus way back in 1979. But Shanmughadas and the supporters of *ayurveda* say that the purpose of giving training in surgery to *salyatantra* students is not to make them surgeons but to enable them to recognise diseases needing surgery and to refer such cases to surgeons. But the medicos maintain that once such training is given to them, without teaching them the basics of modern medicine, it will only create 'quack surgeons' who will be a menace to society.

The crux of the problem, according to the striking medicos, is that Shan-



mughadas is biased against them because he had studied *ayurveda* before joining politics. When contacted, the soft-spoken Shanmughadas, told **SUNDAY**: "The syllabus laid down by the *ayurveda* and homeopathy central councils required the teaching of modern surgery for proper treatment of patients. I have no intention of introducing an integrated medical system in the state." Shanmughadas said that the appointment of those with a degree in *ayurveda* and specialisation in modern surgery in *ayurvedic* colleges was essential for the development of the ancient system of medicine.

Meanwhile, *ayurveda* and homeopathy students have threatened to go on strike if the reservation

for the post-graduate course is withdrawn under pressure by the government. According to them, it was an attempt "to prevent the development of other systems of medicine." Said Dr M N Ramachandran Nair, general secretary of All Kerala Ayurveda College Teachers Association: "It is a canard to say that the teaching of surgery to *ayurveda* students will lead to the mixing-up of the two systems. Many allopathy doctors practise acupuncture which is in no way connected with their system."

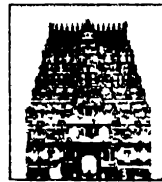
However, the root of the controversy seems to be the fact that the

practitioners of modern medicine earned more money and enjoyed greater social prestige than those practising *ayurveda* and homeopathy. In the marriage market, too, an allopathic doctor gets ten times more dowry than doctors from other systems do. The only solution to the present crisis is a consensus of opinions between the central councils representing the different systems. But, instead of finding a solution acceptable to all, the government seems to be politicising the issue by characterising the striking doctors as tools in the hands of the Opposition Congress(I). And, while the unseemly battle rages, thousands of poor people in Kerala continue to suffer due to lack of medical care. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Trivandrum**

## Tamils first

*Karunanidhi continues to lionise Prabhakaran and criticise the IPKF*



TAMIL NADU

Chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi does not seem to be making any effort to hide his liking for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The state legislature as well as all other government fora are being used by the DMK supremo and his partymen to reiterate their identity of views with those of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and they are all praise for his 'heroic' fight against the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF). The camaraderie between the DMK and the LTTE even extends to calling Prabhakaran another Veerapandiya Kattabomman (a freedom fighter of great valour who had fought the British) and expressing the hope that Prabhakaran will carve out a niche for himself in history.

The Congress(I) and the AIADMK—the two main Opposition parties—have been putting up a weak and often misdirected fight against what could eventually turn out to be some kind of a pan-Tamil movement, inspired by the success of Prabhakaran's armed campaign against the might of the Indian army. For instance, during a recent session of the state Assembly, Congress(I) leader Kumari Ananthan expressed his unhappiness over the manner in which the DMK members greeted the LTTE's success. "Will you also hail the sandalwood smuggler Veerappan as a brave fighter because he too has been putting up a stiff fight against the police?" asked Ananthan amidst strong protests from the treasury benches.

Earlier, a DMK member, P Srinivasan, had termed the LTTE as a group of "sacred freedom fighters" who not only put up a brave fight against the IPKF, but also sent them

(the IPKF) packing home. Ananthan's remark annoyed the DMK members who said that they could not accept such a comparison between Prabhakaran, who had "pure Tamil blood in his veins" and Veerappan, who was "nothing but a forest bandit". After this, the Assembly reverberated with slogans like "long live Prabhakaran" and "long live Kalaignar" (Karunanidhi).

There is enough smoke already to cause panic among the moderates in Tamil Nadu who see possibilities of a separatist movement emerging from the present camaraderie between Karunanidhi and Prabhakaran. And there are allied factors as well, such as the government's indifference, if not tacit support, to some of the blatantly separatist meetings and conferences.

One such meeting was held in Madurai in memory of Maran, a local militant who was killed about two years ago when the bombs he was carrying to blow up the Kodakanal TV relay station exploded.

Karunanidhi and his followers seem to have their own reasons for proclaiming that

they are on the side of Tamil nationalism, even at the cost of embarrassing their comrades in the National Front government in Delhi. Critics of the DMK government allege that Karunanidhi is treading too close to treason by hailing the LTTE and condemning the IPKF.

The chief minister, however, remains unfazed by these charges. He is even willing to risk the dismissal of his government for championing Tamil nationalism. After all, he asks, hadn't his government been dismissed by Indira Gandhi for opposing the Emergency? But it is unlikely that the NF government will take any punitive measure against the DMK at this stage, or maybe ever, despite its ally's controversial stand. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**

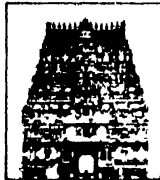


Karunanidhi: playing the Tamil card



# Troubled waters

*The Supreme Court refers the Cauvery water dispute to a tribunal*



TAMIL NADU

On 4 May, the Supreme Court applied the brakes on the 16-year-old dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over the sharing of the Cauvery river waters. A division bench, comprising Justice Ranganath Mishra and Justice P B Sawant ordered the Centre to set up a tribunal within a month to adjudicate the sharing of the river waters between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Union Territory of Pondicherry

The court verdict amounted to a setback for Karnataka since the state has all along been opposing the setting up of a tribunal and was, instead, advocating the settlement of the dispute through bilateral talks. Karnataka chief minister Veerendra Patil had a meeting with his Tamil Nadu counterpart, M. Karunanidhi, in Madras on 19-20 April, but nothing came of that. While Patil, and also the Union government held the view that the dialogue with Tamil Nadu should continue, Karunanidhi declared that the talks had failed and there was no use wasting more time on bilateral meetings.

The April talks were initiated by a Supreme Court directive which sought to give another chance to the contending parties to settle the matter through discussions. But with Karunanidhi declaring that the talks had failed, the Supreme Court's effort was reduced to naught. However, Patil did not agree with Karunanidhi and was optimistic that Tamil Nadu's demand for a tribunal would not be conceded as the Union water resources minister, Manubhai Kotadia, had convened a fresh meeting of the chief ministers of

Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry on 10 May. But with Karunanidhi declaring that he would boycott the meeting, the Centre's effort was scuttled.

The Supreme Court then sought to know the Centre's stand and the counsel for the Union government finally submitted before the judges that Delhi would abide by the court's decision since the case had been heard in all its aspects by the bench during the prolonged hearing. However, the counsel also mentioned that the negotiations had not failed but had only been adjourned.

on 4 May the court's decision on the floor of the House. Recalling that the Assembly had passed a resolution only the previous week, demanding the reference of the dispute to a tribunal, the chief minister thanked all political parties for the support they had extended to the government on this issue.

Karunanidhi, however, failed to thank the private petitioners who had waged a decade-long legal battle in the Supreme Court. The court had, after all, given the verdict on two petitions filed by the Tamil Nadu Cauvery Waters Commercial Crop Growers Welfare Association and a Thanjavur farmer, R Krishnamurthy Iyer. "The court gave its verdict for the petitions filed by us, whereas the chief minister here wants to take all the credit," says K. Subramanian, the counsel and son of Iyer.

In fact, even about six months ago, the Tamil Nadu chief minister held the



**Veerendra Patil (extreme left) and M. Karunanidhi at the Cauvery water talks: fruitless effort**

With the court decreeing that a tribunal must be set up by the Union government, there is hope at the end of the tunnel for the peasants of Tamil Nadu in the Cauvery basin, especially in Tiruchy, Thanjavur and South Arcot districts where the tillers had been forced to suspend double cropping for want of adequate amounts of irrigation water.

Karunanidhi was predictably pleased with the court's verdict and drew applause from all sections in the state Assembly when he announced

view that the dispute could be sorted out through talks with the Karnataka government. "It was only in the final stages that the government here realised its folly and told the Supreme Court that it was supporting our private petitions. This was one of the rarest of rare cases where, in a public interest litigation, the state government chose to support the petitioners," said Subramanian.

According to him, the matter would have dragged on for another six or seven years had

Tamil Nadu



gone to the Supreme Court in April finding that the talks with Karnataka fielded no result. "Had we not filed our petitions in 1984, this judgement would not have come even now," Subramanian told SUNDAY.

When his talks with Veerendra Patil failed, Karunanidhi despatched a delegation of MPs from Tamil Nadu to meet Prime Minister V P. Singh and stressed the need for setting up a tribunal to settle the long-standing dispute. For his part, Veerendra Patil too led a team of his state MPs to meet the Prime Minister to reiterate his stand that the issue could still be sorted out through talks.

Interestingly, Karunanidhi's petition to V P. Singh, through the MPs' delegation spoke of the violations made by Karnataka over the years in building dams across the Cauvery river and its tributaries, without prior consultations with Tamil Nadu—which was a pre-requisite under the 1924 agreement between the then presidencies of Madras and Mysore.

His contention was, however, flawed because Karunanidhi as the chief minister himself had declared—once in March 1970 and again in July 1971—that his government had no objections to Karnataka building dams on the Cauvery river. "You build your dams, we have no objections," Karunanidhi had told the government of Karnataka in his Assembly speech made on 14 July, 1971.

These asides apart, the water dispute appears to be heading towards a settlement, and that is what matters most. "When the tribunal is constituted, it will make physical verifications of the plight of the Tamil Nadu farmers who suffered all these years due to Karnataka's unreasonable attitude."

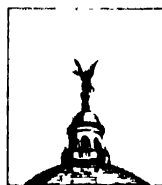
Tamil Nadu went to the Supreme Court seeking relief but withdrew the petition during the previous DMK regime. Critics of Karunanidhi say that he had taken that decision in response to a request made by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi out of political expediency as the DMK was a poll partner of the Congress(I) then.

Much water has flown down the Cauvery since then, and now, after a protracted legal battle and tenacious inter-state negotiations, the farmers of the Cauvery basin hope to get more irrigation water in the future. But they will need some more luck before the tribunal gives its verdict and the good times finally arrive. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh / Madras**

## Party politics

*The Left Front seems to be better placed than the Congress(I) on the eve of the civic polls*



WEST BENGAL

While inner-party fighting is probably inevitable in most Indian political parties, public fisticuffs between party leaders are hardly permissible. And for the Congress(I), the scuffle between supporters of south Calcutta chieftain Pankaj Banerjee and state general secretary Somen Mitra's diehards at the Nizam Palace buildings before the crucial Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) polls and elections to other municipalities in the state was another step towards self-destruction.

Before the previous Calcutta Corporation elections in 1985, Pranab Mukherjee, then the PCC(I) chief was heckled by angry party workers who were denied nominations. But Somen Mitra, MLA, a close associate of state party president, A B A. Ghani.

Khan Choudhury, faced a more intransigent mob shouting "go back Ghani Khan", supporters of Pankaj Banerjee first gheraoed senior party leaders at the Nizam Palace compounds on 2

May. As tension escalated that evening, Banerjee's supporters assaulted Mitra and nearly tore off the *dhoti* of state Seva Dal chairman Abdul Mannan. But as Mitra's security guard waved his revolver and his workers regrouped for a counter-attack, Banerjee's outnumbered legions quickly beat a retreat.

Three days earlier, unhappy with the choice of the CMC election nominees in his district, Banerjee, the south Calcutta Congress Committee president, had put in his papers. With the resignation came angry words. "The selection of candidates was influenced by black money and muscle power," Banerjee alleged.

Former Union minister Ajit Panja,

convenor of the committee that selected party nominees for the polls has already complained to the party high command about Banerjee's conduct. "Who are the anti-social elements and blackmarketeers who are behind the Congress (I) nominees?" the Congress (I)'s recent renegade has been asked. The PCC(I) was merely relaying instructions from the AICC. And since the battle-lines are already well drawn, a compromise is unlikely. This means another messy suspension before the 17 June polls.

While the Congress(I) remains paralysed before the polls the Left Front, despite internal

dissensions about seat allotments and disagreements about the retiring age for school teachers in the state, is firmly in the driver's seat. While blood-red hammer and sickle signs are sprouting all over the newly whitewashed walls in the city, the senior Left Front leaders have placed a re-worked manifesto before the people. No longer will the support to the National Front government in Delhi be unstinted. Instead, the



Pankaj Banerjee: on the warpath

GAUTAM CHATTERJEE

the Left Front will spearhead a populist movement against the rise in prices of essential commodities. "It is time to bring the people to the streets," said chief minister Jyoti Basu recently. But he also added that "a movement is no attempt to dislodge a National Front government, the time has not come when we will ask the people to dislodge the National Front government and I hope the time will never come."

The Left Front's pirouette before the polls is an attempt to shirk responsibility for the recent inflationary trends. But the state government would not call for a Bangla Bandh says Sailen Dasgupta, the Left Front chairman. Such persistent populism may be a long-term necessity. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**



# The road to ruin

*In its haste to provide employment, the Planning Commission forgets all about productivity*



spot of manicured lawns, woodpanelling, deferential waiters and epicurean delights to keep their mental juices flowing. Not to mention their moral indignation and self-righteousness.

With a naughty finger he poked me in the tum-tum (which, admittedly, spreads over my middle in all directions as if it were Madhya Pradesh—which is why I fondly call it my BJP) and enquired— with that droll humour for which Gandhiji was justly famous and Sethi is now acquiring renown— whether it was because all of my blood supply was needed to digest my lunches that my brain was withering away.

This is the self-same Sethi who has just dashed off an angry letter to the Prime Minister denouncing the bureaucracy for commenting on the doings of the Planning Commission. He has refuted none of the arguments of the Committee of Secretaries, only condemned the author of the minutes—a hapless hangover from the Rajiv era who glories in the same initials that I have—Montek Singh Ahluwalia for the cad he is. Sethi's point is that the Planning Commission is there to translate political policy into Plan programmes. It will brook no interference from babus, he says. He points instead to the Valhalla we shall all achieve when we have a statutory, independent Planning Commission—yet another of the National Front's manifesto promises—totally divorced from both the bureaucracy and the elected government.

Ahluwalia is a brilliant economist, who has written a definitive treatise on Indian poverty (instead of merely

lunching out on the subject like You-Know-Who). His colleagues in the Committee of Secretaries are all men (and, one hopes, women) who, by a process of natural *selection* quite as demanding as anything dreamt up by Darwin, have climbed the final length of the greasy pole. The government that asked them to study the wool gathered by the Planning Commission has arrived where it has by a process of *election*.

Where then have the members of the Planning Commission sprung from? Neither by *selection* nor by *election*, merely it would seem by electing to eat lunch in the select seclusion of the India International Centre's (IIC) Private Dining Room.

For we are faced with a strange phenomenon—which history will doubtless call the J D Sethi syndrome—of our new government resorting to "outside talent" in a bid to abnegate its responsibility for governance as well as its responsibility to Parliament. Perhaps they have been left with no alternative since four-fifths of our electorate did not vote for the National Front and three-quarters of the seats in the Lok Sabha are occupied by other parties. With little to draw upon from within their ranks, they are now spreading the superficially attractive doctrine that people who have neither been selected nor elected should—through appointment to "autonomous" commissions and corporations—be given authority without accountability and inured from scrutiny by Parliament.

In every democracy—America, England, even India till the advent of this government—it has always been considered government's business to appoint and be accountable for the judges it sends to the law courts. The NF government intends to duck this responsibility—and the accountability to Parliament which it entails—by shuffling off the job to the unselected and unelected "outside talent" with which it proposes to pack the Judicial Commission.

It is government which should be

responsible and accountable for the activities of organs owned by government and run by government servants, and yet Upendra—in a foretaste of what is to come when AIR and DD become "autonomous"—refuses to accept in Parliament any responsibility for either distorted presentations of Opposition-related news or for the affliction on viewers of three clips every evening showing the PM mumbling on while that curious fur cap of his keeps bobbing up and down with metronomic regularity. (Doesn't he feel hot under it? No, silly, for everywhere our spartan PM goes, he takes his air-conditioning with him!)

Shortly (provided, of course, this lot do not fall apart before then, through their internecine bickering) the Planning Commission is to be given statutory autonomy.





Which brings us back to J.D. Sethi and his fellow-members of the Planning Commission. Sethi reminds the PM through his letter that he (i.e. Sethi) is 66 years old and doesn't have to take any lip from some Johnny-come-lately. Which only reminds us that J.D. Sethi picked up the basics of his economics about half a century ago. As did most of his colleagues. The world has changed since then. But they haven't. And if their blindness were to become "autonomous", the road to ruin would be open.

The trouble with this Planning Commission is that it posits a wholly unfounded dichotomy between growth and employment. Nor does it seem to understand that expansion in employment is not an end in itself for employment generation to be remunerative, self-sustaining and expanding, it must be *productive*, otherwise, we will soon go broke and the temporarily employed will be thrown out of work. It is equally essential to remember that the primary purpose of putting up factories is to produce goods. Produc-

tion cannot be made an incidental consequence, or a kind of by-product, of employment generation.

That is why the most productive economies in the world are also the ones in which the level of employment tends to be the highest—and the wages of labour also tend to be the highest. Where larger employment is achieved by sacrificing the interests of production, you either get sickness in industry (which means strikes, lock-outs and the continuing immiserisation of the working class—splendid Marxian phrase) or persistent shortages and low levels of living (which is causing much of the trouble which we now see in East Europe and the Soviet Union).

Of course, an efficient production process does not necessarily result in adequate employment generation. Also, all production processes are subject to the buffeting and distortions of the marketplace—so dips may—and do—take place, which deprive workers of jobs for no fault of their own and economic growth alone is general-

ly insufficient—especially in an overpopulated, developing country like India—to take up the lag in employment (which runs to millions) or to adequately absorb the massive annual additional inflow into the labour market of young men and women looking for work.

Faced with this problem, the solution offered by J.D. Sethi and his cohorts is to turn rational economics on its head and say "Damn the growth process. We are going to target on employment expansion—and let production go to *je-hannum*."

**T**he Rajiv regime had a different answer, a two-tier answer. First, it said, let's take production seriously—and work towards *efficient* production, both in the public and private sectors, evoking the three-in-one *mantra* "higher productivity, lower costs, better quality." Second, it said, to directly provide for those whom the productive process is unable to absorb, let's take up massive employment guarantee programmes that will give useful employment to the millions who teeter on the brink of the poverty line.

The results are plain to see: the Seventh Plan was able, for the first time ever, to aim at increasing employment opportunities at a faster rate than the inflow of additional labour into the labour market. Thus a real beginning was made in achieving both higher output and higher employment while significantly denting the overall level of poverty.

In contrast to this clear-headed straightforward approach, we are now being subjected to the muddle-headed sentimentality of the self-proclaimed Gandhians of the Planning Commission. In their Approach Paper to the Eighth Plan, they are asking us to choose between production and employment, as if the one were the antithesis of the other.

Thirty-five years ago, Amartya Sen (who is all set to become the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for Economics) solved this conundrum in his remarkable monograph, *The Choice Of Techniques*, which definitively established that if a technology is adopted only for its employment potential and without regard to its productive efficiency, it will inevitably lead to low output and, therefore, to low savings and, therefore, to low surpluses for the next round of investment and, therefore, to lower employ-

**A meeting of the Planning Commission:** It is the first in history to compel the economy to grow more slowly than it is already growing. It will also be the first to reduce employment instead of increasing it!





ment generation next time round.

Now you and I might think 35 years is long enough for such irrefutable truths to percolate into the consciousness of even our present Planning Commission members. But you and I forget that it was 20 years earlier still that this lot last read their text books. The result is that our economy is being burdened by their ideological lumber at just the time it is all ready to ride the crest of the Rajiv take-off.

For, despite suffering drought in two years out of five, our annual average growth rate in the Seventh Plan hit 5.9 per cent—close on double the earlier average of the previous three decades, which Professor Raj Krishna had derisively dubbed as the 'Hindu rate of growth'. To those uninitiated in the gobbledygook of statistics, percentage figures may not mean much. So let me put it this way: In 1961, as the country was readying itself for the launch of the Third Five-Year Plan (and I was collecting my economics degree), India's per capita income was marginally higher than South Korea's. Today, 30 years later—the 'Hindu rate of growth' has given us a per capita income of around \$300 a year, while the 'Buddhist rate of growth' has taken South Korea to \$3,000 a year! Anyone who says growth rates do not matter deserves to have his head examined—or, at any rate, included in the bank of 'outside talent' from which the NE government is drawing its intellectual strength.

In the last five years, our industrial growth steeply accelerated to close on 10 per cent a year. We got there by ridding the economy of unnecessary controls, subjecting the old oligopolies to the pressures of competition, and compelling the public sector to start producing instead of merely employing (which resulted in chairman V. Krishnamoorthy turning the behemoth SAIL spend till instead of incurring losses of Rs 1 crore per day it started earning profits of Rs 1 crore per day, for which achievement the NE government has now unceremoniously sacked Krishnamoorthy).

That we were beginning to succeed was evidenced by successive years of export growth at a rate of close to 30

per cent per annum. We were really beginning to matter in the world.

**S**o with agriculture. During the Sixth Plan, food grains output had hit a plateau. The last two years of the Seventh Plan saw the Rajiv government wrenching the agricultural economy out of its groove. Not only did cereals (including *jowar*, *bajra* and coarse grains eaten by the poor) reach unprecedented levels of output, Sam Proda's technology mission did wonders for oilseeds and the National Pulses project was on the verge of doing the same for *dals* *arhar*, *moong*, *urad*, *channa*. A whole new world of horticulture and food processing was being opened. Dr Kurian was being encouraged to continue his miracles with cooperative dairying.

Now, thanks to the weird combination of the National Front's kulak

notwithstanding the kindnesses of the gods who appear mercifully set to rain a good monsoon on our heads, we are going to see the kharif crop stagger as the price for the non-fulfilment of the bogus election promises made by the National Front.

Notwithstanding its enormous success in getting the Indian growth rate going, the previous government never rested its oars on the production function alone. The old employment schemes were funded at the highest level ever, then revamped, recast and rejuvenated as the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and the Nehru Rozgar Yojana. Meanwhile, the other schemes of the anti-poverty programme were implemented with a vigour and level of financing never before known.

The Rajiv raj showed that growth does not have to be sacrificed for employment to grow. It also showed how to give growth its head and, separately, take up the slack on employment without interfering with the productive process. Our new Planning Commission has become the first in history to compel the economy to grow more slowly than it is already growing. It is going to end by becoming the first Planning Commission to reduce employment instead of increasing it!

The last time J D Sethi was a member of the Planning Commission (which was when the last Janata government was in office) his exertions on behalf of the poor succeeded only in

raising our poverty ratio (i.e. the percentage of people below the poverty line) from 45 per cent to 51 per cent. In the years that we have kept Sethi out of the Planning Commission, the poverty ratio has tumbled from 51 per cent to about 35 per cent. Had he been kept out for another five years, the Congress intended to bring the ratio down to 25 per cent or less by the end of the Eighth Plan. Now that he is back, the only thing that can save our economy from ruin is the precipitate collapse of the government that appointed him. To that noble task, let all good men be summoned. ●

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.



**J.D. Sethi:** *Now that he is back, the only thing that can save our economy from ruin is the precipitate collapse of the government that appointed him.*



**V. Krishnamoorthy:** *Instead of incurring losses of Rs 1 crore per day, SAIL started earning profits of Rs 1 crore per day under him. For this achievement, the NE government sacked him.*

obsessions and the Planning Commission's "rural orientation", we are about to witness, for the first time in decades, a *man-made reduction* in the kharif crop.

And all because V P Singh, at the Tauri's instigation, promised to waive farmers' loans; Dandavate could not find the funds to finance the waivers, the farmers, confused, have not returned their previous loans, and, so, the credit system has dried up. The banks and cooperative credit societies have been left without funds to recycle agricultural credit. Come June, the country will wake up to the startling realisation that as the *kisans* cannot borrow any money, they won't be able to buy the inputs they require and,



# Chinese pleasures

*The Jilin Beijing Opera Troupe captivates Indian audiences*

**A**s cultural expositions go, it numbers among the best and the brightest. And when the Jilin Beijing (Peking) Opera Troupe from the province of Jilin in Manchuria, China, passed through four cities on its recent Indian tour (sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations) it put up a show to remember. Kicking off the tour in Delhi, it had shows in Bombay and Bangalore before concluding its counter-clockwise circle in Calcutta.

Offering a welcome exposure to one of China's leading art forms, the troupe presented a typical—if condensed—evening of Beijing Opera. As is the common practice, they performed extracts from familiar Chinese stories.

In Calcutta they did the episode *Stealing the Magic Herb* from *The White Snake*, a short love story titled *The Jade Bracelet*, and ended traditionally with the grand finale—*Havoc in the Dragon's Palace* from the novel *Journey To The West* (also called *Monkey*).

In the last-named work, one of China's best-known and most popular classics, a Buddhist monk and his three bestial disciples—a monkey, a pig and a fish—undertake an arduous trip to the Western Paradise in order to locate and bring back the authentic Buddhist scriptures. Many adventures befall them on the way before they successfully negotiate all hurdles and return to a royal welcome in China, their mission accomplished. This repository of ancient tales has continually fed Chinese culture to date and, what's of interest to us, bears a direct link with Indian history.

The monk in question was none other than the real-life Hsuan-tsang, who travelled to India in the 7th century to consult the Buddha's teachings in the original because he was dissatis-

fied with the contradictions present in the Chinese versions he had read at home. Like his literary counterpart, Hsuan-tsang experienced many an adventure on his travels before returning to China with 657 manuscripts, of which he ultimately translated 73, enriching the knowledge of Chinese Buddhism and propagating it widely.

History gradually became fiction as Hsuan-tsang's pilgrimage got mixed with colourful Chinese folk stories and mythological traditions. A novelette in verse and a play by Yang Ne, a Mongol dramatist in the Ming court, dealt with these stories before Wu Ch'eng-en, a 16th-century author, consolidated them in the *Hsi-yu Chi* (*Journey To The West*), China's

through all the perils they face and quite a few temptations placed before him. His often humorous exploits form the centre of attraction in many plays of the Beijing Opera.

**B**eijing Opera, the dominant theatrical form in China, became an institution only in the mid-19th century, when many regional performers with different stylistic backgrounds congregated in the imperial capital and influenced the development of this new genre. It uses well-known stories as a basis on which to improvise: since spectators know the plot already, they judge a performance on the interpretation or production values, as is the case with Indian classical dance dramas.

Similarly, Beijing Opera has a rigid system of conventions involving character, expression, movement, speech, singing, costumes, make-up and properties—every little variation has a distinct shade of meaning. As in Indian tradition, for instance, circling the stage indicates a lengthy journey, the colour and style of dress and face-painting suggests the personality being depicted, and hand gestures carry specific denotations. Above all, the most attractive parts to the foreigner are the



**A scene from *Monkey*: a show to remember**

greatest comic novel. Its 100 chapters narrate 81 separate incidents of the fictionalised foursome's foreign foray, the diversity of which has made the work immortal in Chinese minds.

In fact, the focus of *Hsi-yu Chi* falls not so much on the monk as on the monkey, which is why its most familiar English translation is very simply titled *Monkey*. This monkey, who swore to obey his master and guard him from danger, stands by his word

astonishing acrobatic displays, which suggest one reason for China's customary strength in such sports as gymnastics and diving.

During the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao, Beijing Opera received short shrift along with other traditional arts. Troupes were either neglected or asked to modify their plays to fit communist doctrine. It was good to see that their typical beauty has been revived without reference to political matters. ●

**Ananda Lal/Calcutta**



# On the Swami's trail

*The mysterious godman proves elusive, and reveals little when finally cornered*

In late October last year, roughly six weeks before Rajiv Gandhi lost the election, I went to have a drink with a lawyer in New Delhi. He was a young bearded fellow who produced a bottle of Chivas Regal and a packet of State Express cigarettes. My request was simple: how soon could he get me an interview with his famous client Chandra Swami? After checking out my brief, the lawyer made my idea seem like no trouble at all. "We'll do a preliminary meeting first. So that the two of you can get to know each other."

So began a two-month-long effort to tackle the subcontinent's biggest con-man, bagman and godman, all rolled into one.

As wheeler-dealers from the twilight zone go, this spiritual shyster means business. He is the man who claims to advise the Sultan of Brunei. He is the conman who introduced call-girl Pamela Bordes to fellow conman Adnan Khashoggi. He is the charlatan who led two famous press barons, Tiny Rowland of *The Observer* and Ramnath Goenka of the *Indian Express*, on the biggest wild goose chase of their careers. He is the spiritual healer who is said to have cured Elizabeth Taylor's bad back and the jaded libidos of countless wealthy Arab potentates. And he is the political guru who nearly succeeded in breaking two successive

Indian governments.

For three years he threatened to unseat Rajiv Gandhi by producing conclusive evidence of who had pocketed payoffs worth US \$ 50 million in a US \$ 1.3 billion gun deal with Bofors, the Swedish arms manufacturer, in what is India's longest-running and still incomplete defence scandal. When Gandhi finally lost the election chiefly due to his government's failure to account for the Bofors' bribes, the Swami was back in action—this time on the other side of the fence. He was now the bagman attempting to buy MPs to prevent the new minority government being formed.

Reason: During the period he was busy blackmailing Gandhi's government, that government in return was hounding him by conducting tax raids on his homes, slapping cases of forgery and fraud against him and impounding his passport. So while the Swami skilfully led Gandhi's political opponents, which included the *Express*

group, to believe that the promised evidence to bring down Gandhi in the Bofors scandal was at hand, he was, in fact, secretly conducting a deal with Gandhi to ensure that India's longest-serving political dynasty remained in the saddle. Overnight, the tax cases against the Swami were dropped and his passport handed back as his only purpose became to ensure that Rajiv Gandhi stayed in power.

**As wheeler-dealers from the twilight zone go, this spiritual shyster means business. He is the political guru who nearly succeeded in breaking two successive Indian governments**

RAKESH SAHA



India's 498 million voters scotched the Swami's scheme. But it was against the swiftly-changing scenario of the world's most populous democracy banishing a corrupt government, that I came to understand how this world-class double-dealer operates.

Following my drink with the Swami's lawyer I took to telephoning him regularly for the promised interview. "Tomorrow," he would say, or "The Swami's really busy. Try tonight." This was curious, considering that a year earlier the Swami and





**Chandra Swami: the subcontinent's biggest conman, bagman and godman, all rolled into one**

his chief henchman, an oddie called Mamaji, had virtually been plucking journalists off New Delhi's pavements for interviews.

A few days later the election was announced and the lawyer stopped answering my calls. In the ensuing days the war of attrition between us escalated. I began calling him at unexpected hours. One day, the lawyer threw up his hands and said. "You don't believe me that the Swami's tied up? I'll put him on the line for you. Call him at home tonight, here's his number."

I did, and the Swami came on the line. He apologised for the unforeseen delay. He spoke in chaste Hindi. "But what can I do," he groaned. "Come and see the scene here. There are hundreds of people at the door." He had a funny way of ending each sentence in a high-pitched giggle, like a squeaky rubber toy.

"What are the hundreds doing outside your door, anyway?" I asked.

"Oh," said the Swami giggling. "What else? Hoping I'll get them a seat in the election." The Swami swore that we would meet soon. "We'll do the interview in Hindi as my English is not so good." He wanted to show me his special album of photographs with the rich and famous. He was keen on speculating what the election result might be. And he was delighted to go into details of how and where his photograph for the story would be shot.



As I only half believed his status as a key powerbroker in the coming election, I drove out late that night to his home to see if his clout was, indeed, exceptional. The house belongs to a former wrestler-turned-B-grade movie actor. It is a hideous suburban building with an empty swimming pool in the front garden, a Mercedes in the porch and guards at the gate. But there were no crowds, certainly not the cast of hundreds and thousands that throng politicians' residences on the eve of Indian elections.

Our cat-and-mouse game continued. I went on the road to cover the election campaign but kept up my calls to the Swami and my ear to the ground. The most unexpected people knew the man—in the most unexpected places. At a large, New Delhi dinner party, a London-based Sindhi businessman began to rock with uncontrollable laughter at the mention of his name. "Kay," he shouted across the bar. "Kay, come over here. Tell him what the Swami did for your cousin."

Kay, who had more gold Krugerands than hair on his chest, waddled over. He told me how he and his playboy cousin—the heir to a huge fortune in America who was terrified of losing his sexual urge—met the Swami often in London of the early 1980s. For some reason, said Kay, word had got around London's expat Sindhi community that the Swami was a purveyor of powerful aphrodisiacs. "Ya know what he told my cousin," said Kay. "He said he could make his penis move the biggest rock in the world. He gave him dark little pills. Ripped him off biggest too."

"But tell him, tell him about those pills," interrupted the first Sindhi excitedly. Kay's Krugerands jingled. "Well, it was like this. My cousin's old aunt found out. She asked my cousin one day if he suffered from acidity. When he said no, she said, 'Then why are you eating Hajmola pills six times a day?'"

At this all three of us burst out laughing. Hajmola is the commonest traditional herbal digestive, the Indian equivalent of Alka-Seltzer. It costs \$2 for a bottle of fifty.

"An ya know what he was selling them for to those sherks in the Gulf," Kay was saying as I left the bar. "One thousand dollars a shot. One thousand dollars..."

Next evening I dropped in to see the fashion designer Bina Ramani, the queen of the transcontinental Sindhi set. Of the dozen Indians of the Swami's acquaintance I met, including well-known politicians and civil servants, she was not afraid to be named. She is a cool, striking-looking woman, a pillar of the social establishment who divides her time between running boutiques in India and New York. I asked her if the story of the Swami and the Hajmola pills was true. "I wouldn't put anything past him," she

famous Emergency rule was coming to a close and she was desperately in need of friends overseas.) He called India's Prime Minister "my spiritual sister" and preferred to be addressed as His Holiness. "I am like India's Dalai Lama," he used to say.

Ramani introduced him to a few well-known people including the conductor of the New York Philharmonic Zubin Mehta, the Maharaja of Jaipur, and Asha Puthli, the pop singer. In return, the Swami introduced her to Julian Carroll, the Governor of Kentucky. He seemed, she said, to have a whole directory of introductions to members of the Carter administration. Within weeks she was astonished to find the Swami referring to Carroll as his "spiritual brother."



Rajiv Gandhi



Giani Zail Singh

**Chandra Swami succeeded in furthering a constitutional crisis when an epistolary battle broke out between Rajiv Gandhi and the then President, Giani Zail Singh**

said laughing. "He may be a dangerous man but he is also one of the funniest. He has the fatal charm and mental energy of a wicked child. He is like a tireless spider spinning his web to ensnare us all."

In the late 1970s when she was married to an Air India executive living in New York, her husband came home one evening and announced that he had instructions to look after a visiting VIP from India called Chandra Swami. "My husband brought him over for dinner. He was irresistible," recalls Ramani. "Within minutes my children were climbing all over him."

The Swami's special line those days was that he had been sent to the United States as "Mrs. Gandhi's spiritual ambassador" (This sounded vaguely plausible: Mrs. Gandhi's in-

A gallimaufry of Swami's friends soon evolved—among them Senators, UN delegates, socialites and would-be rock stars—pressing for audiences with the sensational new Indian guru. His formula was simple: the more important the people introduced to him, the more powerful the new introductions he could obtain. Soon he was hobnobbing with the now dethroned US House of Congress Speaker Jim Wright and the Gulf's Galadhar family. Most important, he managed to forge a close association with international crook Adnan Khashoggi.

And through Khashoggi he met, and succeeded in temporarily casting his spell on, the richest man in the world, the Sultan of Brunei.

An Indian diplomat, stationed in New York when the Swami first hit the city, remembers that the Swami's earlier business deals were on behalf of modestly wealthy Indian immigrants settled in Surinam, South America, and the commodity being sold was mundane: soyabean. "Severed from India for generations, these people, even more than New Yorkers, were susceptible to the Swami's call of Hinduism and the Homeland. His method of winning friends and influencing people is always the same: a shrewd mixture of name-dropping, mind-reading and religious mumbo jumbo. For instance, his fortune-



telling through astrological charts consists of standard sleight-of-hand tricks. He combines these with an uncanny ability to zero in on people's needs, their ambitions and their miseries "

**T**he Swami's money deals rapidly burgeoned as his Fil-o-fax fattened: through the Kentucky governor he tried to sell some of the state's famous coal deposits abroad. Through his friendship with African leaders, like President Mobutu of Zaire, a country rich in copper, he attempted brokering in other commodities. By introducing one potential dealer to another the peripatetic Swami cast his net wide. Starting as a mystic masseur he became a rich and famous middleman himself.

In 1982 he ran into the young Pamela Bordes at a Nepalese diplomat's reception in New York. She was then a small-time huntress coasting along the Whiter Shores of Lust. Immediately impressed by her good looks he promised to speak to his friend Jim Wright about her green card. But by introducing her to Adnan Khashoggi he turned the art of hooking millionaires into a hooker's Raj. Bordes later told Lynda Lee-Potter of *The Daily Mail* that while she was physically afraid of Khashoggi she remained mentally afraid of the Swami. "He had a strange,

powerful effect on people... He wanted to dominate my mind."

Meanwhile, the Indian press faithfully added local colour to the Swami's splashy international spread. It reproduced photographs of former foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari's honeymooning on Khashoggi's yacht *Nabila* (now Donald Trump's *Princess*). The Swami himself, more often than not, was to be found ensconced in Khashoggi's guest apartment in Onassis's Olympic Tower on Fifth Avenue. Stories of how he exercised spiritual control over P.V. Narasimha Rao, the most senior minister in Mrs Gandhi's, and later Rajiv's, Cabinet were commonplace. One visitor entering his New York apartment in the fall of 1985 was startled to see hotel tycoon Lord Forte bowing low as he left

the Swami's presence.

To this potent combination of business dealing and spiritual healing, the Swami brought the use of some very modern paraphernalia—for proof and possible blackmail.

No scandal concerning him is complete without the use of photographs with celebrities, forged letters from the possibly powerful, or tape-recordings of dubious provenance.

In 1983, Bina Ramani recorded an interview with Mrs Gandhi, later published, in which she asked if the Prime Minister knew the godman. Mrs Gandhi recoiled in horror and called the Swami "that scoundrel". She said that the Swami had managed to have himself photographed with her at some official reception and later used that

book *By Hook Or By Crook*, the tapes are further obscured by the fact that the Swami, claiming he has no English, uses his famous flunkey Mamaji as translator—the three-way conversation contains more nonsense than sense. In actual fact, the Swami speaks perfectly passable English; but only when it suits him.

Two years after the Al-Fayed-Tiny Rowland battle erupted, the Swami took Indian press baron Ramnath Goenka and his editors for a similar ride. He produced a photograph of himself together with Martin Ardbo, a former chief of Bofors, and thereby convinced Goenka that he could produce incontrovertible evidence about the pay-offs in the scandal, that would nail Rajiv Gandhi's government.

More damagingly, he succeeded in furthering a constitutional crisis when an epistolary battle broke out between Gandhi and the then President, Giani Zail Singh.

When the government got wind of the schemes it raided press baron Goenka's properties on 13 March, 1987, on the grounds of tax fraud. Entering Goenka's company flat in New Delhi, the taxmen found the Swami sitting amid piles of papers, including a draft of the President's angry letter to the Prime Minister. Within days of the incident the Swami disappeared from the country. When he re-

turned he found the heavy hand of Gandhi's government come crashing down on him. But that was only till he had made his personal peace with the Prime Minister.

On 21 October, 1987, he penned a long, grovelling letter to Gandhi which is a model of unctuous Indian-English, among other things. It offers his services as an agent of Gandhi's government: "I would like to strengthen your hands and extend my cooperation...by divulging to you whatever information I have." At the same time it leaves the Prime Minister in no doubt of the Swami's worldly prowess: "On my part I have good, intimate, cordial relations with at least 6,070 heads of states and important personalities, developed during my travels to 177 countries."



Chandra Shekhar



V.P. Singh

**Chandra Swami was trying to prevent V.P. Singh becoming PM by backing his rival within the party. But Singh outmanoeuvred his challenger and got the job**

picture in a brochure advertising himself. Turning to an aide present during the interview, she said: "Tell Miss Ramani about that fraud."

His record of apparent forgeries is fascinating. The most famous is the case of how on 6 and 7 June, 1985, in a Carlos Place flat in London, he secretly taped conversations with Mohamed Al-Fayed confirming that the Egyptian might have used the Sultan of Brunei's cash for his £ 615 million purchase of Harrods. While Al-Fayed later claimed that the tapes were forged, the Swami sold them to Tiny Rowland for \$2 million.

What makes the evidence in the Al-Fayed tapes inconclusive is not only that they are lousy recordings. But as American author Steven Martindale suggests in published extracts of his



**B**ut the ubiquitous Swami continued to elude me still. In the second week of November as the election campaign hit its final feverish pitch, my calls to the lawyer at last paid off. "Now," ordered the lawyer one evening. "Come over *now*!"

I was over in a flash. In a bedroom adjacent to the lawyer's marbled drawing room sat the Swami. He looked a very jolly sight. From neck to ankle he was swaddled in rich white silk bordered in green and gold.

This greatly exaggerated his darkness, his tubbiness and his straggly beard. On his forehead he wore the red *tikka* of devout Hindus. At his chest dangled a necklace of big gold beads ending in a massive gold pendant. On his plump wrist twinkled a diamond-studded watch. His feet were incongruously encased in white tennis socks that peeped from under his *dhoti*.

He was apologetic and charming and quoted, quite accurately, from my election reporting in the morning's Hindi paper. All he wanted to discuss was the poll's outcome. "So how is it going for Rajiv's party?" he asked.

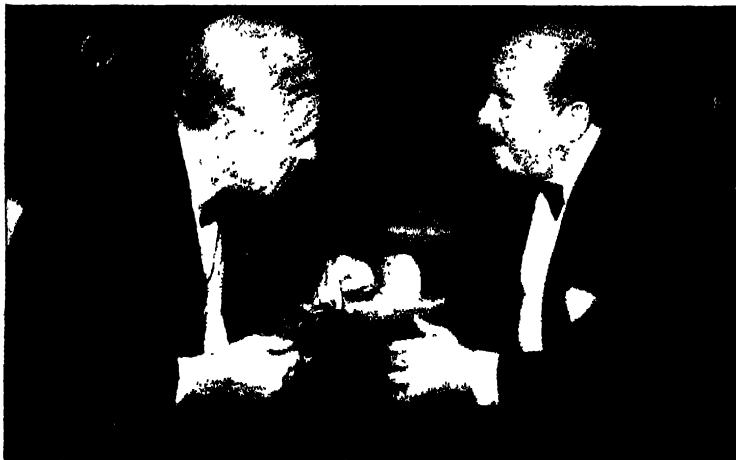
Badly, I was forced to admit. Like every politically aware Indian he was adept at election arithmetic, and began counting on his pudgy fingers the number of seats each party might win in each state.

I disagreed with his calculations: There was little hope, I said, of Rajiv Gandhi returning to power in the face of the vigorous campaign being conducted by his opponent V.P. Singh. The Swami did not like this: he was by now banking on Rajiv's return to the extent that he had lately been instrumental in fabricating a case on an illegal \$21 million account held in the Caribbean island of St. Kitts by V.P. Singh's son Ajeya. The papers had been carrying details of the unsubstantiated case. All manner of forged bank documents were again afloat in town. There could be little doubt where they were emanating from.

"Never mind," giggled the Swami. "What about our interview?" He pur-

red with pleasure over the prospective photo-session. We fixed a time two days later for the photographer and myself to visit him. Within seconds, the lawyer whisked me upstairs for more Chivas Regal.

Later that night I ran into Mohan Guruswamy, who is neither a guru nor a swami as his name suggests, but just another respectable executive with political affiliations. I had hardly mentioned the saga of my interview with the Swami, when he smiled, tapped my knee, and said: "Now, now, you're asking for a story."



Adnan Khashoggi (right) and Tiny Rowland

**Chandra Swami introduced call-girl Pamela Bordes to fellow conman Adnan Khashoggi and led Tiny Rowland of *The Observer* on a wild goose chase**

It was the old song, but the sting was new. He assured me that he had been at college with the Swami.

"When I was at university in Hyderabad," said the executive, "there was a funny little fellow called Nemi Chandra Gandhi who hailed from Rajasthan. No one quite knew what to make of him and no one really took much notice. He was an unsuccessful student and equally poor in his role as a student leader. He tried badly to become a leader of the youth wing of Mrs Gandhi's Congress party.

"A couple of years after graduating I was invited to the home of a famous minister for a religious ceremony. Imagine my shock on arriving there and finding this inconspicuous fellow, dressed in the saffron robes of a monk, leading the ritual around a sacred fire." When that minister was inducted into Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet, the Swami gravitated to Delhi as one of his informal advisers and began to develop his own version of realpolitik.

**T**wo days later I arrived, photographer in tow, at the wrestler's mansion which the Swami called home. A young man, his secretary, rushed out to greet us. The Swami, he said, was very sick. He could not be disturbed. He would call me later tonight.

The Swami did. "It's terrible," he moaned, "This fever and cold I have. How about doing our interview next week." And he fixed another time.

But before the week was out Rajiv Gandhi had lost the election.

The key political question now was whether the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the left, which had supported V.P. Singh, would sink their ideological differences to back Singh's minority government. They did.

And there was one more hitch: Would Singh's candidature for the job of Prime Minister be contested?

It was. The papers were full of how the Swami, operating out of suites in a plush hotel and rushing around in his golden Mercedes, was trying to prevent Singh becoming PM by backing his rival within the party. There was

talk of possible defections by some newly-elected MPs. And of fantastic sums of money changing hands. But in the end it turned out that Singh outmanoeuvred his challenger and got the PM's job. The Swami was lost.

Twelve hours before my date with the Swami his secretary rang. The Swami was too unwell to see anybody. He had taken ill and our appointment stood cancelled.

It was the last I ever heard of him. No, not quite. A week before the New Year, his lawyer rang me. "Will you come to my New Year's Eve party?" he wanted to know. "I'll send you a card."

"But how's the Swami feeling?" I asked.

"Fine," laughed the lawyer. "He's sitting with his pal Khashoggi in New York."

**Sunil Sethi/New Delhi**

This story originally appeared in the May 1990 issue of *Tatler*. Copyright: The Conde Nast Company, London.



**R**emember Sabia, of the Rajesh Khanna attempted-rape fame?

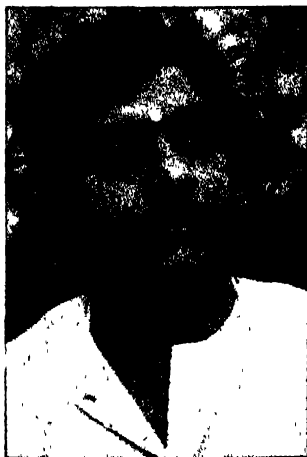
No, nor did we, until she resurfaced on the sets of Pranlal Mehta's *100 Days* to play a tennis match with Madhuri Dixit on camera. Obviously, neither Sabia nor her pushy mother, yesterday's bit actress Ameeta, had given up on their starry ambitions. And yes, their desperation was intact as well. For, what did Ameeta do but insist on taking up the hem of dear daughter's mini-skirt to ensure that she stole the show from the sexy Dixit.

Unfortunately for the mother-daughter duo, this is one instance where quality (of exposed limb) matters far more than quantity

**H**e's a star employee in more ways than one. Anjan (Wagle) Srivastava continues to work at his Juhu bank, quite the cynosure of all eyes as he goes through his daily routine.

And much to the delight of the bank authorities, Srivastava has managed to inveigle his fellow-stars (such stalwarts as Amitabh Bachchan, Anil Kapoor, Salma Agha and Farha among them) into opening accounts in his branch, increasing its deposits by a mind-boggling sum.

**Anjan Srivastava: star employee**



PRANAL MEHTA



**Madhuri Dixit: Sabia is better**

**S**udden success is always a little difficult to handle, especially if it is totally unexpected. Or else why would the new heart-throb of filmland, Salman Khan, behave in so execrable a manner?

At the *mahurat* of Sawan Kumar Tak's latest film *Sanam Bewafaa* (starring Khan and new find Rukhsar), photographers requested Salman to pose for some cosy pictures with his lady-love Sangita Bijlani. The sexy Khan demurred. The photographers per-

sisted. And the next thing they knew was that Khan had stomped off, mouthing the choicest of abuses at the lensmen

"I don't need any photographers to make me a star," were Salman's parting words.

Perhaps But surely he doesn't need bad press to unmake him, either.

**J**ayaprada seems to be overdoing her adventurism of late. Her insistence on doing her own stunts, for instance.

Her performance on the sets of producer-director Mahendra Shah's *Zakhmee Zameen* had the onlookers utterly shell-shocked. Refusing the services of a duplicate, Jayaprada insisted on running through a stretch of land, which had been mined. Twenty bomb blasts were scheduled to go off shortly after the actress had reached safety.

As it turned out, Jaya had a narrow escape, the explosions occurring a mere thirty seconds after she had crossed the field. ●



# THE BATTLE FOR

*Rajesh Kadian analyses where the IPKF went wrong in Sri Lanka*

**B**y October 1987, India, having sought peace through appeasement of both the Tamils and the Sinhalas, faced war. On 8 October the LTTE seized the initiative; a Jonga carrying five unsuspecting para-commandos on their way to collect supplies was ambushed. The men were hacked to death, then tyres were put around their necks and ignited. On the same day the Chief of Army Staff, General Sundarji, flew to Jaffna, he was received by a grim Lieutenant General Depinder Singh. The ostensible purpose of the trip was to save the peace; the real reason was to prepare for battle—and the army chief wanted to personally satisfy himself about the situation on the ground before giving the go ahead. The next day the LTTE fired on a CRPF patrol; three were killed. In the meantime the Indian defence minister, K.C. Pant, reached Colombo—he was there to make sure of political support for IPKF's crack-down on the LTTE. The Sri Lankan Government was happy to oblige. On 10 October Jayewardene revoked the amnesty, declared the LTTE illegal and placed a bounty of one million rupees on Prabhakaran's head. The IPKF also flexed its muscles; the 1st Battalion of the Mahratta Light Infantry ventured out of Jaffna Fort and blew up the printing press of two LTTE newspapers—and the *Eelamurasu* and *Murasoli*—the TV centre, *Nidhar-sanam* at Kokuvil was occupied. The telecasting and transmitting equipment was seized and close to a hundred persons arrested. Another five hundred suspected LTTE militants and sympathisers were also rounded up. The action was not limited to Sri Lanka; six powerful radio transmitters in Madras were also seized.

The purpose was not only to tell the Tigers that the IPKF meant business but also to reduce their ability to communicate with each other.

The action had another effect, it warned the LTTE that full-scale war was imminent. Accordingly, LTTE positioned their defences, booby traps, men, and material to fight the Indians. Their defensive line was in two tiers with strong fortifications at strategic cross-roads to deny IPKF a major axis of advance.

They did not have to wait long and the most significant fighting took place in the Jaffna peninsula; 50 per cent of the Sri Lankan Tamils lived in these 1300 square kilometres and the area was an LTTE stronghold.

On its part, the IPKF was overconfident and understrength in the peninsula. Senior military officers publicly declared that the LTTE would be routed within three days. Their confidence was based on intelligence assessments that the LTTE had neither the resources nor the resolution to put up a fight. The strength of the Tigers was estimated at about 3,000. Conventional military teaching calls for an attacking force to be around three times stronger than the defenders. Under adverse circumstances like lack of knowledge of terrain, fighting in built-up areas (towns), hostile local population, well-motivated and well-trained defenders, etc. even larger forces may be required. All these adverse circumstances were present in Jaffna. Instead of a

**The IPKF commandos: a thankless job**





# JAFFNA

requirement of about 15,000 combat troops, the IPKF had only about 6,000 men. Two battalions, 5 Madras and 8 Mahar of 91 Infantry Brigade, were at Kankesanthurai; two battalions of 72 Infantry Brigade, i.e. 4/5 Gorkhas and 13 Sikh Light Infantry were at Palaly. An additional battalion, 5 Para, was still moving in. A solitary battalion of the division, the 1st Mahratta Light Infantry belonging to 91 Infantry Brigade was sharing the Jaffna Fort with a battalion of the Sri Lankan Army. A battalion of para-commandos (10 Para-comando) and a regiment of light artillery completed the forces at the division's disposal. Not only was the number of battalions too small, even their effective strength was below par—about 30 per cent of the troops were away on leave, training courses or had been left behind in India. A brigade, 18 Infantry Brigade, belonging to 36 Infantry Division was assembling at Chavakachcheri and was placed under 54

Infantry Division for military operations.

The Indian plan, code-named Operation *Pawan* (wind) was envisaged as a whirlwind campaign aimed at nothing short of the outright occupation of Jaffna with limited resources. The fort with its helipad, its commanding position by sea and being the administrative heart of the city was designated as the pivot around which the battle would evolve. All three brigades were positioned at a distance of about twenty kilometres from the fort in three different directions. The advance would be along a number of axes which would therefore divide the attention of the LTTE command and also reduce the number of militants available to fight the Indians along any particular axis of advance. The opposition, therefore, was expected to be light and disorganised along each of the Indians' line of attack.

**T**his plan, neat on paper, was flawed. First, as mentioned above, it were the attacking Indians who were understrength compared to the Tigers. Secondly, the area was heavily built up with solid houses and walled compounds which reduced the IPKF's capacity to spread out or manoeuvre. It also herded the Indians into narrow, confined areas where they would be more exposed to fire and find it difficult to escape from. Thirdly, given the failure of intelligence on numerous occasions in the past, the Indian Army should not have taken the intelligence estimates on their face value.

Radio interception had already confirmed the location of the Tactical Headquarters of the LTTE in a house across the road from Jaffna University. The capture of this administrative brain of the enemy was made an important objective.

These plans were transmitted on AN PRC-25 VHF sets which can be locked into, i.e. the transmissions can be intercepted. It is possible that the LTTE was listening in on Indian radio communications and were well aware of their plans. All roads leading into Jaffna had already been mined—some of these explosive devices had been installed years ago when the roads were metalled. Other metalled roads were mined by digging along their sides, and then under the tarmac and planting drums and buckets of explosives—usually Pentolite—



Rajiv Gandhi with Jankus Jayewardene



**J**ayewardene revoked the amnesty on 10 October, declaring the LTTE illegal. It was obvious that Rajiv's hope that the IPKF operation would be a "short, sharp exercise" was only wishful thinking





**Gen. A.S. Kalkat : In Jaffna it was tactical failure**

**T**he Indian plan, codenamed Operation Pawan (wind) was envisaged as a whirlwind campaign aimed at nothing short of the outright occupation of Jaffna

purchased in India. In this manner the benign original look of the roads was preserved and it did not betray the lethal contents underneath. Many of these explosive devices could be electrically detonated by connecting them to a nine-volt battery at a distance of a hundred to two hundred yards away. So the militant had to be physically present to see his target before he could set off the explosion. Buildings were liberally booby-trapped and weapons were taken out of caches. These included AK-47 rifles, 5 inch Browning machine guns, RPC-7 anti-tank rockets and an array of mortars of varying calibres. Walkie-talkie radios were issued to small groups allowing for quick and easy communication. Ammunition was in comparative short supply, but fire discipline and good marksmanship was expected to make up for this scarcity. The morale of the militants was high, and their motto—stealth, speed and surprise—was soon to be translated into action.

The Indians advanced on the night of 11 October. The 91 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Ralli moved from Kankasanturai. A battalion, 8 Mahar, was ordered to advance along the coastal road in a north-western direction before turning south-westwards towards the fort. The initial advance was swift and trouble-free. The LTTE had obviously been taken by surprise at this circuitous advance. However, at about three kilometres from the fort the troops were divided into penny packets to secure a more direct route to Palaly; by then the LTTE had organised its defences in the region. Their mines played havoc; the advance stalled. In addition, twenty-four others in four trucks lost their way; seven died in a hail of bullets, the rest were captured. The other battalion of the brigade, 5 Madras, too advanced slowly along roads in built-up areas and was promptly held up around Chunnakam. The third battalion, 1 Mahratta Light Infantry remained inside the fort, perhaps because they realised that the entire area around the fort was heavily mined by the militants.

The 72 Infantry Brigade was a part of 36 Infantry Division but placed under 54 Infantry Division for the battle of Jaffna. This brigade under Brigadier Misra advanced from Palaly towards the Fort. The 4/5 Gorkhas were following the only tanks in Jaffna, a troop (four tanks) belonging to 65 Armoured Regiment. Their objective was the Jaffna University campus and the LTTE Tactical Headquarters. At about eight kilometres from their objective an ambush wiped out the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bawa, and two company commanders, Majors N.J.D. Singh and A.A Verghese. The latter's death was particularly poignant. The only Tamil-speaking officer in the unit, he went into a house to comfort crying women and children. As he left he was shot in the back by an old

woman. With seventy dead, many more wounded and a single field officer (Major) unhurt, the Gorkhas were unfit for further battle.

**T**he brigade's other battalion, 13 Sikh Light Infantry, was earmarked for another battle; the fate of a platoon of this unit was to decide its outcome. This unit had already had a difficult war. The battalion was moved from Gwalior to Jaffna in August 1987. On 7 October while reinforcements were being flown into Sri Lanka, these troops were sent back to Gwalior. The following day they were once again air-lifted to Bangalore, and thence to Palaly Air Base. A company (about 130 men) of these weary troops was immediately detailed to assault the LTTE Tactical Headquarters. A part of the battalion reinforced by 4/5 Gorkhas and four tanks was to later link



**LTTE leader Prabhakaran (right) with his deputy Mahitya: outwitting the IPKF**

up by fighting their way through Jaffna. A company of para-commandos were to serve as pathfinders, i.e. they were to land first and secure an area for the heliborne Sikh L.I. Company which would follow. A football field in the Jaffna University campus was selected as their landing zone. The para-commandos landed from their helicopters into a hail of intense fire. Two of the helicopters were damaged taking off; at least six soldiers lay dead. Meanwhile, an advance platoon of the Sikh L.I. landed at another part of the field. Murderous fire damaged another three of their helicopters. At Palaly a decision had to be made. Heliborne reinforcements were impossible, given the intensity of fire and the lack of enough serviceable helicopters. A message was radioed to the hapless platoon that the remainder of the company would not follow. But there was no one to receive the



message in the bloodied playing field of Jaffna University; the platoon's radioman was already dead. The para-commandos, trained in individual survival, managed to take cover in buildings and spread out. While doing so, they even picked up their dead and wounded. Instinct told them that further heliborne landings were not likely. On walkie-talkie radios they managed to contact the beleaguered Sikh L.I. platoon and asked the Sikhs to join them. The Sikh company commander, Major Birendra Singh, faced a major problem; he had to wait for the remainder of his company—which he did not know would never come. He, therefore, chose to stand his ground. By 11.30 a.m. of 12 October, his men had run out of ammunition. A gallant bayonet charge was the gory finale; only one out of the original thirty survived to tell the tale. The bare bodies of the troops' were publicly



**Debris after a LTTE attack: the charred remains of an IPKF jeep**

displayed by the LTTE at the nearby Nagaraja Vihar Temple before being cremated. Meanwhile the remnants of the para-commando company hung on to their positions. They were finally rescued by their colleagues who, supported by tanks, advanced along the railway line to link up with them. This rescue was likewise performed in the face of intense fire; for instance, Major Anil Kaul, the commander of the tanks, was hit in the eye and right arm when he peeped above the tank turret to guide his men along the railway line.

**F**resh leadership and more troops were an obvious requirement. So Brigadier Kulwant Singh, the Deputy General Officer Commanding 54 Division, flew into Jaffna from his Headquarters in Trincomalee expecting to take effective command of the Division. Since the IPKF was under the jurisdiction of

the Southern Command, a senior staff officer, Major General A.S. Kalkat, was moved from Pune to Jaffna to oversee the operations. The Army Headquarters in faraway Delhi sent their own man as well, Brigadier R.I.S. Kahlon. Harkirat, in turn, undertook a journey in the opposite direction. He was ordered to submit a report in person at the Army Headquarters to explain the military setback; the army brass was not convinced by his explanations. For the sake of appearance he was sent back to Jaffna.

During this week the number of troops in Jaffna Peninsula was doubled with the induction into the island of two new brigades under Brigadiers Manjit Singh and Samay Ram. In doing so, the Indian Army violated an important principle of deployment. Formations are normally moved en bloc; i.e. Brigade should move as a whole, its headquarters and three battalions should all be sent in together. Since these units have participated in the same training exercises they are familiar with each others' strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. The officers, likewise, develop personal rapport among themselves. This allows the brigade as an entity to function more effectively and maintain cohesiveness under the stress of battle. In Jaffna, on the other hand, one of the Brigadiers found himself with an unfamiliar Headquarters staff and battalions belonging to other brigades.

Growing a little desperate at the ferocity of LTTE's resistance, and in a bid to satisfy the political imperative of getting the job done quickly, the army brought in more armour, including tanks and Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFV). The tanks were India's latest—the 45 tonne Soviet T-72 Main Battle Tank. It was felt that these tanks with their heavier tracks and high traction would be most suitable for the bumpy jungle terrain of northern Sri Lanka. Consequently the 65 Armoured Regiment belonging to 31 Armoured Division was despatched to the Island, thereby committing first-line tanks to fight urban insurgency. Similarly the 20-tonne Soviet BMP-2 Armoured Fighting Vehicle was inducted into the island.

**O**n Diwali night—21 October, 1987—the Indians resumed the fireworks. Even at the state they used tracings of the 1937 maps of Jaffna to guide them through the peninsula. Also most of the new battalions that were rushed into Sri Lanka were understrength. For example, 5 Rajputana Rifles (a part of 41 Infantry Brigade) arrived on the island with about 400 men—less than half of its ideal strength.

The 41 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Manjit Singh was added along the axis of the 91 Infantry Brigade. The 115 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Samay Ram was added along the north-south axis of advance of the 72 Infantry Brigade. The 41 Infantry Brigade moved along the northeast towards the south-

**T**he Tigers' rearguard fired on the Indian soldiers from the hospital buildings in order to stall the IPKF advance. Consequently the hospital in effect became a military target



The CRPF personnel with the army men: lending a helping hand



west with Manjit riding in a BMP personally leading the attack. This led to problems of command and control; Manjit ended up sacking two of his Commanding Officers, his Brigade Major and his Signals Officer. His personal bravery and dynamism were, however, beyond reproach and he was later to be suitably decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra (MVC). If his handling of his officers was controversial, so were the number of casualties his men sustained; a loss of 272 dead and

wounded—about 17 per cent of his entire combat strength. In addition, along his line of advance fell the Jaffna Hospital to where the LTTE were evacuating their wounded. As the Indians advanced, the LTTE tried to remove their injured from the back of the hospital. The Tigers' rearguard also fired on the Indian soldiers from the hospital buildings in an attempt to stall the advance long enough to allow the LTTE to withdraw their wounded. Consequently, the hospital in effect became a military target.

As mentioned earlier, the LTTE had extensively mined and booby-trapped the heavily built up area between Palaly and Jaffna fort and 72 and 115 Infantry Brigades had now to contend with them. Colonel Saraon, the Deputy Commander of 72 Infantry Brigade was killed when his BMP hit a mine. The entire complement of nine other men in the BMP also lost their lives. The blast was so intense that the 250 kilogram doors of the BMP were flung to a distance of 100 metres. A couple of tanks were likewise destroyed. Brigadier Samay Ram remained true to his reputation of steadfastness. He refused to react strongly when his men were fired upon from one of the landmarks of Jaffna—the Nallur Kandaswamy temple. Here at least 30,000 Tamil civilians had sought refuge from the fighting. Recognising the likelihood of significant civilian casualties he held his hand. The LTTE, perhaps mindful of these civilians, likewise chose to withdraw.

The third major line of Indian advance from Chavakachcheri eastwards also continued to

encounter fierce resistance. The MI-25 helicopter gunships had to be pressed into service to shoot down LTTE snipers perched on coconut trees. Only then did the advance proceed east of Navatkuli. The IPKF admitted to twenty-seven civilian deaths in one such helicopter attack.

The Indian forces linked up from all directions of their advance by 26 October. There was little time to celebrate; combing operations by fanning out were started the very next day. Three of the brigades were ordered to do so. The 91 Infantry Brigade tackled the Pandattarippu and Vaddukkodal regions, the 115 Infantry Brigade moved towards Point Pedro and the 18 Infantry Brigade towards Kodikamam. A few skirmishes continued but the battle for the peninsula was clearly over.

The LTTE tacitly conceded Jaffna the same day. Their second-in command, Mahitya, told *India Today* on 27 October, "We are willing to a cease-fire on three conditions. The Indian Army should cease fire immediately. The IPKF should return to the camps where they were prior to October 10, and only then will we be willing to talk about surrender of arms."

The IPKF officially gave their losses as 262 dead and 927 wounded, the dead included 15 officers and 14 JCOs. Two of the officers were Colonels. The LTTE losses were put at around 700-800. Not one of its top leadership had been killed or captured; most of the Tigers had escaped using boats to cross the numerous lagoons around Jaffna. Only hundred or so weapons were captured suggesting that many of the dead were actually unarmed civilians.

In a well-orchestrated propaganda blitz the LTTE claimed to have "documented" at least 900 deaths, 451 serious injuries and 144 cases of rape among the civilians by 24 October. They conceded the loss of only six of their own, including an "officer", a "Captain Ashok". They also declared that half of the population of the peninsula had been rendered homeless and the IPKF was in fact the "Innocent People Killing Force." The Indians were later to prove these claims as wild exaggerations.

Later the Indians were to uncover about 2,000 weapons from various arms caches scattered across Jaffna. But this unearthing of weapons could not hide the bitter truth; the LTTE cadres were still armed and at large. India had thus managed only a partial victory at a great cost. And the IPKF was no longer welcomed by the Tamils. Rajiv Gandhi had earlier prophesied, "It should be a short, sharp exercise and our boys should be back home soon."

That this was not going to be so, was already clear. ●

*India's Sri Lanka Fiasco* by Rajesh Kadian Published by Vision Books

**The IPKF was overconfident and understrength in the peninsula. Senior military officers publicly declared that the LTTE would be routed within three days**



# To India, with love

*Stalin's daughter plans to move to the subcontinent*

**H**er interest in Indian philosophy dates back to the Fifties, when she spent long hours reading the *Upanishads*. During the Sixties she used the royalties from her books to finance the establishment of a hospital in Kalaknagar, Uttar Pradesh. And now Stalin's daughter Svetlana Allileeva—who calls herself Lana Peters—wants to spend the last years of her life in the land of the Mahatma. She would prefer to settle down in an ashram near Madras (it's cooler than central India) but Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh would do just as well, her American friends work among the Tibetan refugees living there.

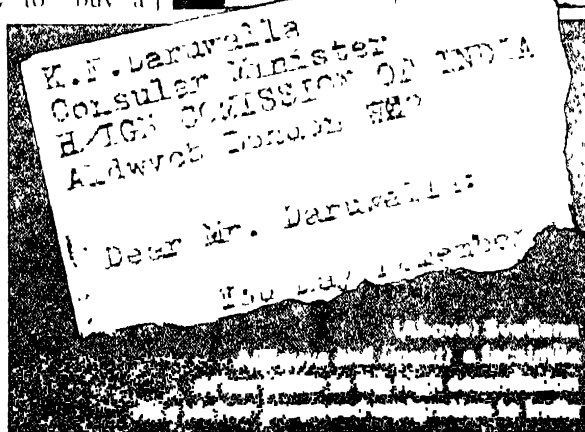
The 63-year-old Svetlana's wish might just come true, with the Indian high commission in London granting her a five month visa. Lana Peters—as she signs her letters—had approached India House authorities with her request (mentioning eminent jurist Nani Palkhivala as a possible guarantor of sorts) maintaining that she wished to settle down in the subcontinent to 'study Indian history and culture, do yoga and read Sanskrit and the Upanishad'. She was willing, she said, to wait until the authorities in Delhi decided the issue (with distinct political overtones). The V.P. Singh government had no objections to her presence. So Svetlana is all set to visit India in October this year. And if things work out, she will stay long enough to be granted Indian citizenship.

Currently resident in north London, Svetlana has no money to 'buy a ticket to Delhi or anywhere'. Hence, the delay in her travel plans. But as soon as she arranges for the publication of her books in the United Kingdom and receives the royalties thereof, she will take off for the subcontinent. The search for a 'good publishing house' will begin after that, which will bring Svetlana's books to Indian readers. One of her works, *The*

*Faraway Music*, had been published by Lancer International (New Delhi) in 1984 but the company forgot to pay the author her dues.

On the whole, Svetlana's Indian experience (the first time round at least) has been rather unfortunate. In 1969 Allileeva set up a 30-bed hospital in an Uttar Pradesh town, Kalaknagar, using the proceeds from her books to finance the project. Named the Brijesh Singh Memorial Char-

itable Hospital, it was to be administered by the US based Allileeva Charitable Trust comprising Svetlana's American lawyers. Popularly known as 'Svetlana's hospital', the project ran into trouble from the very beginning. Allileeva's version of events is that her lawyers never paid any attention to the hospital and ignored all her instructions *vis a vis* the project. To make matters worse, Congress(I) politician Raja Dinesh Singh initiated a crusade of sorts against the hospital.



named after his uncle Brijesh Singh.

Two decades later, the medical services provided by the hospital haven't really improved. And a thoroughly disillusioned Allileeva wants the Government of India's health ministry to take over so that the patients—most of them poor villagers—have a better deal.

Svetlana is certain that if she were to return to India this matter would be brought up again to embarrass her. But that is no deterrent as far as the spunky Allileeva is concerned when it's October, it will be India. •

**Shrabani Basu/London**



**I**t usually takes a tragedy for the authorities to wake up. Though nothing of the kind has yet happened, the vast oil slick that is floating in the waters of the Damodar river for the past one month could well cost several human lives in the states of West Bengal and Bihar.

The oil slick was first spotted by a group of Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) men in the Chandrapura region of Bihar, not very far from the Bokaro Steel Plant (BSP). Sensing danger and correctly assessing that the oil must have leaked into the river from one of the units of the steel plant, they quickly passed on the information to the BSP authorities. It took nearly five hours for the steel plant experts to locate the leak, but by then 200 kilo litres of furnace oil worth Rs seven lakhs had flown into the Damodar. And aided by strong winds, the oil slick travelled as far as Jamadoba and was steadily making its way towards West Bengal. Realising the havoc the spillage could wreck, the chief secretary of the Bihar government, A U Sharma, immediately informed his West Bengal counterpart, Tarun Dutta, of the crisis.

Meanwhile, the chiefs of most industrial units—the DVC and the Durgapur Projects Limited (DPL) included—along the Damodar belt put their heads together to deal with the crisis. As a preliminary measure, the BSP released 2500 cusecs of water into the river to keep the oil content low. Suggestions were also made to flare up the slick.

Even while all such efforts were being made, the oil slick reached Durgapur, the industrial town of West Bengal. The situation was alarming since the only source of drinking water for the inhabitants of the town was the Damodar river. And even before the town administration could come to grips with the situation, traces of the oil were spotted at the Damodar barrage in Durgapur. Says an official of the water works unit of the DPL, "There is no cause for panic at the

# The deadly spill

*Panic spreads as furnace oil pollutes the Damodar*



moment. The maximum oil content that is permissible in drinking water is 6 ppm (parts per million). The DPL is constantly sampling the water of the region and the oil content till last week was fluctuating between 2.4 to 3.5 ppm, which should be safe for the people."

But Debabrata Banerjee, vice-

chairman of the Durgapur Development Notified Area Authority, is not taking any chances. His men are already putting up barriers to prevent the oil from seeping into the intake points and the irrigation canal.

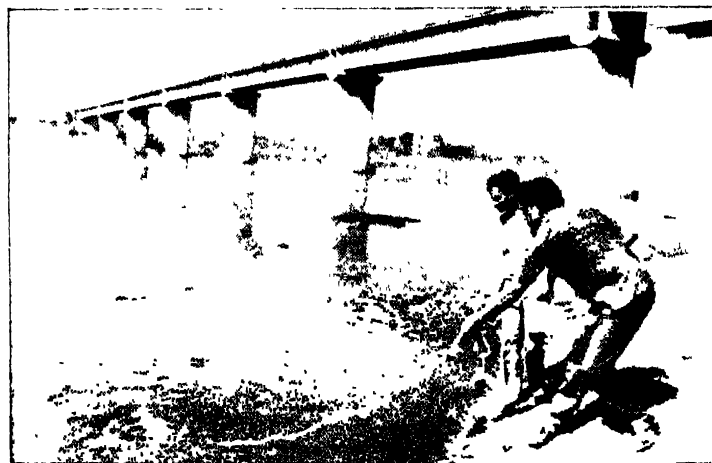
But what if the river water is actually contaminated and becomes unfit for human consumption? Admits an official of the DPL, "We do not have the technical knowledge to tackle such a situation. There is no way to purify the water once it crosses the 6 ppm level." Tallen Kumar, the sub-divisional officer of Durgapur, however, rules out such a possibility.

The only solution at the moment, feel many experts, is not to allow the oil-water ratio to increase. And the Mathon dam authorities are doing exactly that by releasing millions of cusecs of water into the Damodar every day.

**The Bokaro oil spill has not perturbed the people of Durgapur. For, throughout the year, they are used to seeing thick black effluents flowing down the river**

**B**ut is the spillage of tonnes of deadly oil just an accident? There are many who feel that most of the





(Clockwise from far left) People bathing in the Durgapur canal: ignorance is bliss; effluents from local industries flowing into the Damodar: polluting the river; BSP men sampling river water: keeping vigil

industrial units—both private and government-owned—on both sides of the Damodar have scant regard for environmental safety norms and the BSP alone cannot be pulled up for contaminating the river. In fact, the managing director of the giant steel plant, S R Ramakrishnan, claims that his unit has so far had a blemishless record. However, the recent incident has made Ramakrishnan and his colleagues sit up. According to the MD, a deal is being negotiated to set up an effluent treatment plant that would ensure a zero discharge level.

But is the BSP the sole culprit? In fact, despite the publicity that followed the Bokaro oil leak, the people of Durgapur seemed least bothered. For, throughout the year, they are used to seeing thick black effluents gushing into the river from the numerous industries that dot the town. No wonder, the Damodar in Durgapur has earned the distinction of being the "most polluted river" in the country.

An alarming state of affairs. For, all

along its 541-km long stretch, covering the Dhanbad-Giridih belt in Bihar and the Asansol-Durgapur region of West Bengal, the Damodar is the only source of drinking water. And thousands of people live off the river. But over the years, the industries along the bank—there are as many as 46 large units and hundreds of

medium and small ones—have polluted the river. With no checks worth the name, these industrial units release deadly effluents in the form of fly-ash, phenol, cyanides, ammonia and alkalis into the Damodar. Add to that domestic and agricultural waste and the picture is indeed disturbing. No wonder, the people who use the river water suffer throughout the year from skin and other water-borne diseases. But like many other things, they have accepted them as realities of life.

The storm over the Bokaro oil spill many believe, will soon blow over. The authorities who are overreacting now will once again sit back and helplessly look on as the industrial units violate pollution laws with impunity. The oil slick that is floating around on the waters of the Damodar is a cruel joke for all those clamouring for a greener and better tomorrow. •

**Most of the industrial units have scant regard for environmental norms. The BSP alone cannot be blamed for polluting the river**

**Sarthak Banerjee/Bokaro and Durgapur**



# Head count

*What the  
1991 census  
will show*

**W**hat a diary?" my wife exclaimed when she discovered the leather-bound pocketbook now falling apart, bearing the inscription, "Diary for 1917" Published by the Army and Navy Cooperative Society, 105 Victoria Street, Westminster, and bearing my long-departed grandfather's notings in slanted letters, it was indeed the funniest family memorabilia that my wife ever stumbled upon while cleaning out old wardrobes and junk trunks. In 1917, we soon read, there were three eclipses of the moon and four of the sun, the Michaelmas term at

Oxford began on 10 October that year, a pound sterling then was equivalent to five US dollars or 100 deutsche marks. A few dogeared pages into the diary, and there was evidence, in grandpa's scribbles, of a niece's marriage being 'negotiated' with a government clerk earning the princely amount of Rs 40 a month.

That was quite a lot of money until the early Forties, when prices in India began shooting up. The babu's salary worked out to only Rs 1030 at current prices, or three-quarters of what a lower-division clerk at the state secretariat may expect today.

What was wrong with my grandpa? Why was he planning to marry off his niece to





Someone who would not even have been able to eke out a living in a Bombay chawl today? Yet the old man had described the "boy" as "well-off"

It dawned on me a few seconds later that perhaps Rs 1030 a month could be reckoned as a good salary if the aspirations of people then were lower than today. And that's exactly what India was like, as seen from the 1921 census report. The country's 251 million people, of which only 11.18 per cent were urbanised, were only a third of the human ocean of present-day India. What is more, only 7.16 per cent of them were literate, female literacy being as low as 1.81 per cent.

By then, the consumer revolution had arrived in the West, but grandpa's India had neither the cash nor the desire to acquire the goodies that the factories of the rich nations were rolling out. The living standards of the people were quite simple and poverty and

**Crowds in Calcutta: the city is among the most congested metros in the country**



**Slums in Bombay: an inevitable fallout of the population explosion**

fatality were accepted realities of life. One example: around 1921, percentagewise, four times more babies died at birth than now.

If the census reports are recognised as decennial snapshots of a nation's demographic and socio-economic march, the journey between 1921 and 1981 seems like an endless voyage. Even in physical terms, the country seems to have shrunk, with the density of population having increased 2.63 times. The country grew five times more literate during the period and its city and town dwellers accounted for more than three times of the entire population of Britain.

All these would have been a confounding journey for my poor grandfather who, in 1917, could not even comprehend that the decennial population figures in 1911 and 1921 would show a negative growth, a phenomenon which has never occurred again. But how about comparing, albeit without the aid of H.G. Wells' time machine, two closer snapshots: the census report of 1981 and the forthcoming survey of 1991? Listing of households, which is the first step in a census operation, has already begun for the 1991 census. Come next February, and 12 lakh enumerators will fan out across the nation to cover the households listed and prepare the final report by April, 1991.

In 1981, when the census report put India's population at 685.2 million, the Expert Committee on Population Projections estimated that the figure would reach 837.2 million in 1991, going by the mortality and fertility trends of the 1971-'81 decade. However, the World Bank, in its report on India this year, said that there could be "undercounting" in the Indian census figures, thus "correcting" the 1981 figure to 701.5 million. The

**The addition to India's population in the Eighties was about the current population of Brazil, or one-and-a-half times the population of Pakistan**





Indians spend a meagre 1.7 per cent of their income on education

**In India, food, clothing and shelter take away a major chunk of one's total spending. In any developed nation, health and education alone account for a quarter of household expenditure**

World Bank estimate for 1991 population, too, overshoots the Indian experts' figure by a margin of 11 million. At any rate, will the 1991 census show that India is ultimately crossing the population hump?

Probably yes, because the decadal variation in the Eighties can never reach the whopping 25 per cent in the Seventies. It may stand at 22.8 per cent. It is still disturbing, showing that the addition to India's population in the Eighties was about the current population of Brazil, or one-and-a-half times the population of Pakistan. In fact, the population growth in India between 1971—the year we went to war with Pakistan—and 1991 would have far exceeded the size of my grandfather's India.

Kerala and West Bengal, the two Marxist-ruled states, will continue to be the most congested. In 1981, their densities of population (per sq km) were 655 and 615 respectively, leaving Bihar (402), Punjab (333), Uttar Pradesh (377) and Tamil Nadu (372) way behind. Now the two red states may well show astronomically high figures of 772 (for Kerala) and 740 (for West Bengal), against the projected national population density of 254.

It is no wonder that the people of the two states had topped the list of job-seekers in 1981, constituting 37 per cent of the total number of persons available for work in the Indian job markets. In both West Bengal and Kerala—as well as in most corners of gangetic India—the increasing pressure on land is still

putting many millions of Indians on the migration trail, with the city lights luring away village people just as it had in the West a century ago. From 19.9 per cent in 1971, India recorded 23.3 per cent urban population in 1981. The figure is estimated to go up to 27.4 per cent next year.

Urban migration is merely another side of the nationwide scramble for jobs. The 1981 census showed that of the total male migrants who crossed the boundaries of the states where they were born to find a toehold in cities, 55.7 per cent had employment as the only motive. Only 4 per cent moved out in search of better education.

The migrant character of the Indian mega-cities became clear even in the 1981 census report. In that year, for instance, 54.6 per cent of the population of Greater Bombay were

migrants, more than a third of these migrants had settled down in Bombay for 9 years or less. Delhi had a slightly less share of migrants—45.09 per cent. But of them, nearly a half were neo-migrants. It shows that Delhi is a late entrant in the employment market, its magnetic pull being caused by the burgeoning of the central government's expenditure in the recent decades.

Next year's enumeration will show the extent to which towns and cities have been further invaded by the people uprooted from their soil. It will also find the direction of a whole array of structural changes. The previous census showed that the shares of agricultural labourers, both male and female, to the total workforce were on the decline. Yet as many as 65.6 per cent of the male working populace in 1981 were living off land, or forestry and fishing. Add to that 82 per cent of the female working population also engaged in the same sector. Together, this vast army produced only 39.9 per cent (at current prices) of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that year.

The share of agriculture in GDP further declined to 34.5 per cent in 1988-89. But the 1991 census alone will say how many Indians are now producing how much rice or wheat, or other agricultural produces. Similarly, the planning ministry estimated that in 1988-89, 39.1 per cent of the GDP had come from the services sector, trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communication;



financing, insurance, real estate and business services, and community, social and personal services. But these sectors appointed very few people in 1981: only 16 per cent males and a measly 8.5 per cent women. The coming census will tell us if the trend is going on unabated, or the services sector, supposedly the barometer of a society's modernity, has become a creator of jobs as well.

**S**ince grandfather's India, literacy has no doubt come a long way. For each educated Indian in 1921, the year we were using as point of reference, there were 15 in 1981. The number will probably go up to 20 next year. But the point to note is that the number of illiterates has also doubled since 1921 -- the figure should stand at a staggering 48 crores next year. In other words, illiterate Indians today comprise nearly a half of the population of China.

In 1981, only 39 out of 1,000 newly-married urban women (and only two in the villages) were graduates. Half the new brides in the cities and towns were downright illiterate, and so were 84 per cent of their sisters in the villages. The 1991 picture can be rosier only marginally, with no breakthrough in sight in the field of female illiteracy and high population growth rate.

Yes, life expectancy at birth is possibly up by about five years in the intervening decade, thanks to a delayed and still ongoing spread of antibiotic drugs and the slow acceleration of the immunisation programme. But, according to the government's projection analysts, the gap between death rate and birth rate in the past five years was still a mind-boggling 19 per 1,000. At this rate, it may not be before the 2051 census that we may record the worry-free rate of 1 per cent per annum population growth rate.

But can so many of us share the nation's limited resources for such a long time? Doubtful. Census projections estimate the population at 2001 around 98.6 crores, which again is sure to contain a good measure of "under-reporting", as is typical of all backward countries. Food grains production may barely match up to that kind of growth, but housing, healthcare and civic amenities are sure to elude a large chunk of the society.



In 1981, the census people did not even go into the question relating to toilet facilities in rural homes. But even in the urban areas, 41.85 per cent of the houses were without toilets. Only 14.69 per cent of village homes had electricity, while 27.14 per cent of urban homes did not even have a drinking water tap within their premises. In fact, life in the cities seems to be a difficult one, if one goes by the census figures. Calcutta, for example, had tap water only in a third of its homes. In Bombay, nearly seven out of ten families lived in just one room.

Energy consumption per capita, measured in kilogrammes of oil equivalent, is a standard yardstick of lifestyle. Though India has made a long stride in this respect, from 100 in 1965 to 208 in 1987, it may take the country a whole decade, or more, to catch up with the present consumption rate of the supposedly poor China (525) or Egypt (588).

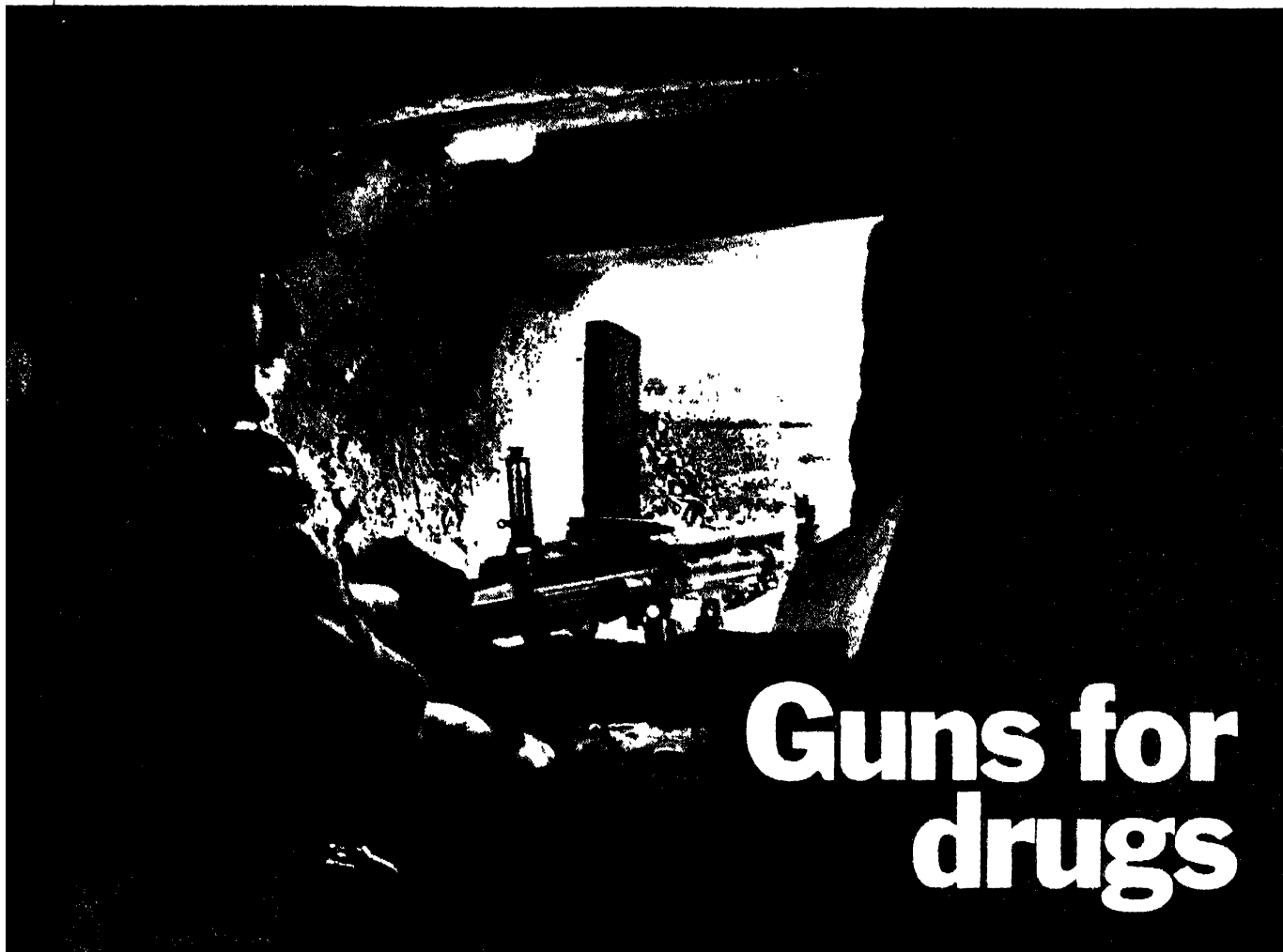
Maybe the 1991 census will show the average Indian to be living a better life than say, a decade ago. But it will take him at least 50 years at the present rate to sort out his basic problems of food, clothing and shelter. These three take away three-quarters of his total spending, leaving only 2.5 per cent for health and a meagre 1.7 per cent for education. In any developed nation, health and education alone account for a quarter of household expenditure. ■

Sumit Mitra/New Delhi

**Healthcare is way down on the priority list of the Indians**

**Maybe the 1991 census will show the average Indian to be living a better life than, say, a decade ago. But it will take him another 50 years to sort out his basic problems of food, clothing and shelter**





## Guns for drugs

**A BSF jawan stationed in Amritsar: keeping vigil**

*This trade-off sponsors terrorist violence throughout the world*

**S**ome call terrorism the theatre of violence. Some call it the cheapest form of communication for militant groups. The problem with defining terrorism, members of the United Nations have often said, is that terrorists of one country might be regarded as freedom fighters of another.

But defining the fast-spreading worldwide phenomenon of 'narco-terrorism' is even more difficult. The term was first heard of in Latin America after the Colombian M-19 insurgents indulged in the drugs-for-arms trade, though the business defied a description. Neil Livingstone, an American author and authority on terrorism, attempted one definition. "Narco-terrorism," he said during a recent seminar on narcotics and terrorism, "is a meeting of people with a fantastic amount of money and a fantastic amount of violence." Also, Livingstone added, "These days it is easier and safer to be a narco-terrorist than to rob a bank."

Though there is no support system for terrorist groups in the United States, unlike France, West Germany, Libya or El Salvador,

the nation contributes heavily towards sustaining narco-terrorists in other parts of the world. The US accounts for one half of the drug consumption worldwide and drug lords are now increasingly exporting arms and mercenary expertise instead of cash returns out of the US. In countries like Panama and Colombia, the drug lords create an economy on which the country runs. Where state-sponsored terrorism exists, narco-terrorism is sure to thrive.

In India, narco-terrorism has flourished in states witnessing extremist activities, such as Manipur, Mizoram and Punjab. Narcotics smuggling plays a significant role in sustaining the militant movements in these areas. The trend was first noticed in Punjab when raids on the Golden Temple revealed large quantities of drugs. Then, many arrested hardcore terrorists turned out to be narco-smugglers. Among them were Jagjit Singh Narewala, arrested from a drug house in connection with the Delhi transistor bomb blasts, and Harjinder Singh Jinda, who was a small-time drug runner before he joined the Khalistan Com-



mando Force (KCF) Even at the time of his arrest in 1987, Jinda—who plotted the assassination of General A S Vaidya—had some high-grade heroin on his person

The Indian enforcement agencies first took notice of the growing phenomenon of narco-terrorism in 1988. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) published a report that revealed the deep-rooted nexus between traditional smugglers and Punjab terrorists. The report stated that militants who had previously used methods of extortion for procuring arms were now changing their *modus operandi* exchanging guns for narcotics. Drugs had replaced silver and other contraband for keeping the guns booming in the Punjab.

Typically, Pakistani infiltrators would conceal weapons at a predestined spot in the fields which would be exchanged for drugs in the dead of night. The couriers, sometimes earning a mere Rs 200 for the transaction, were integral to the nefarious chain. After Operation Bluestar, small arms were smuggled in a steady trickle of ones and twos. The arms were mostly of Chinese or Soviet origin. With the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the trickle became an avalanche. The price of arms in Darra Adam Khel—the

infamous arms bazar near Peshawar—fell, the narco-terrorists had never had it so good.

Undoubtedly, many of the narco-operators of Punjab have developed strong international links. In New York, senior Federation Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents admitted that expatriate Sikhs were dealing in crack-cocaine to fund arms purchases in the Punjab. Many of the newly-constructed *gurdwaras* in America, they said, were centres for the trade. This confirms that the trend thrown up with the recovery of \$40 million worth of drugs from a New York *gurdwara* in 1985 is still continuing.

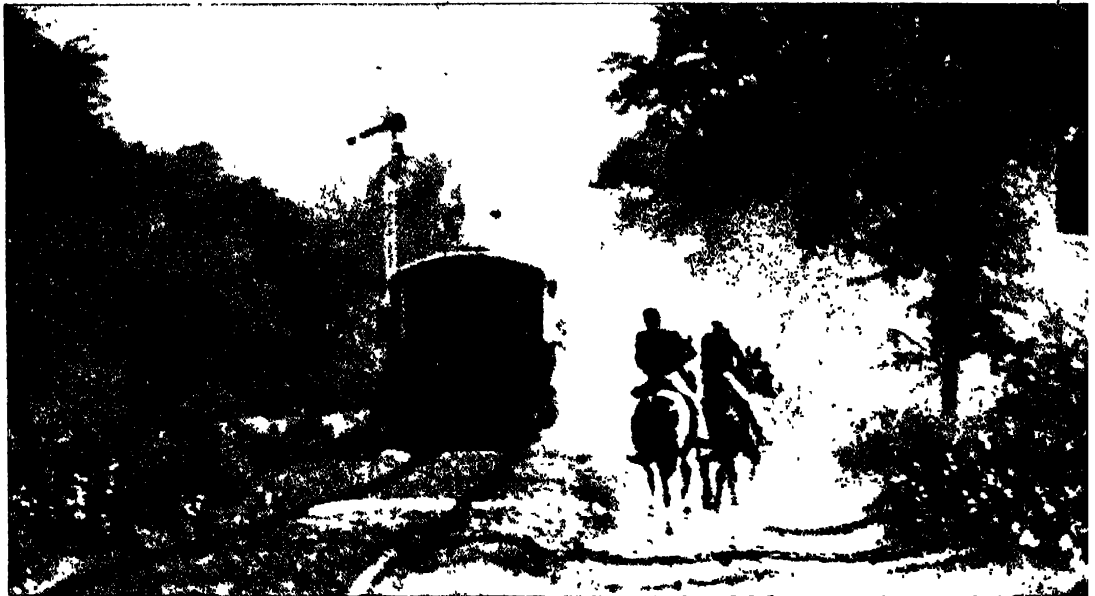
**I**n the Punjab, narco-terrorist gangs suffered a setback last year, when the Indian government decided to seal the 544-kilometre-long border with Pakistan. Almost simultaneously, other routes became active. The smugglers shifted to Rajasthan and it was no coincidence that there was a spurt in terrorist activity along the Kashmir border. Pakistani arms dealers shifted their attention to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). About the same time, according to intelligence reports, drugs

were being sent with infiltrators into the Jaffna peninsula. Many of the sophisticated arms used by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), including shoulder-firing surface-to-air missiles and German assault rifles, have reportedly been purchased with drug money from New York and Los Angeles.

That is precisely the reason why America is blamed for sponsoring narco-terrorism.

While the annual budget of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is around \$500 million, the agency has seized assets and drugs valued at over \$1 billion. Recently, it recovered 21 tonnes of cocaine from a Los Angeles warehouse, apparently smuggled into the US by a cartel in Colombia.

**Mounted patrol along the Indo-Pak border: dangerous operation**



This is also true of countries with state-supported terrorism, such as Libya and Panama. It is well known that the Gaddafi government has often sponsored the dreaded Chicago-based street gang, El Runkins. Then, the capture of Panama military leader, Manuel Noriega, had all the trappings of a sensational drug bust story.

At present, a public battle is raging in the US to snap the links between guns and drugs. The Bush administration, obsessed with the drug war, is nevertheless noncommittal about the guns. Although several world leaders, including Colombian President Virgilio Barco, have insisted that the US ban the export of assault rifles and other weapons which arm members of drug cartels, the government has not done much about it.

Meanwhile, Intelligence reports speak of greater cooperation between terrorist groups of different nationalities, as is the case in India and Sri Lanka. It is feared that with F-EC '92, the border would become even more porous—making the dangerous business of narco-terrorism that much easier in Europe. •

**Ritu Sarin/New York**

**In New York, senior FBI agents admitted that expatriate Sikhs were dealing in crack-cocaine to fund arms purchases in the Punjab**



# Time to celebrate

*Calcutta's Mohammedan Sporting Club turns 100*

**H**as the name Mohammedan Sporting outlived its purpose? As this leading amateur club of the country celebrates its centenary, this question looms large on the minds of sports lovers. The same question could be asked of another illustrious name—East Bengal. The names may have been appropriate when the clubs were born but today, when there is unrest all around, would it not be better to do away with everything that divides, rather than unites?

And yet, Mohammedan Sporting started out under an entirely different name. In 1881, several eminent people

tions with other Indian clubs in a set-up dominated by British regimental teams. Most of all, inspired by the urge for the expression of freedom, Muslim players recruited from different parts of the country converged not only to forge unity but to create a whole new world of achievement.

The activities of the club did not go unnoticed. Its formation was reported even in newspapers published in Britain and its activities followed with interest. The club fielded both cricket and football teams, but it was in the latter game that it achieved major successes.

It all started with the Nawab Begum

continued an amazing run of success that included five league titles and one IFA Shield victory—the first time that an Indian team won both the league and the IFA Shield together in one year.

Not since the Mohun Bagan triumph in the IFA Shield in 1911 was there so much jubilation in the country over an Indian team's victory. Mohammedan Sporting came to be looked upon as a symbol of the aspirations of the youth of the country. And this run of success could have continued for at least another three years, as subsequent events proved. But the club had differences with the Indian Football Association, dissociated from it in 1939 and, together with a few other disgruntled clubs, tried to play separately.

That was a crucial break. When the differences were resolved, the club returned to the league fold and went on to win the title again in 1940 and '41. If the club had stayed on, it would have won in 1939 too. That means the club would have won the league title uninterrupted for eight years—a feat that would not have been surpassed even today, because East Bengal's successes in the Seventies continued for six years.



**West Bengal sports minister Subhas Chakravarty with the torch amidst Mohammedan Sporting fans: glorious past**

started the Jubilee Club. But a lack of interest and inability to cope with the administrative requirements led to the folding up of the club. Some of the original members gathered a few more people around to start another association, this time calling it the Crescent Club. But even this club was short-lived. And yet another name was coined: Hamidia.

Finally, in 1891, Mohammedan Sporting was born. With it ended years of uncertain existence. Its leading members used their influence to get the club a separate playfield and tent on the Calcutta Maidan.

Initially, the club was the rallying point for Muslim aspirations in a subjugated society. It had the best of rela-

tionship with other Indian clubs in a set-up dominated by British regimental teams. Most of all, inspired by the urge for the expression of freedom, Muslim players recruited from different parts of the country converged not only to forge unity but to create a whole new world of achievement. The first win came in 1906, followed by another, three years later.

But Mohammedan Sporting's greatest triumphs came in the Thirties. Playing for the first time in the first division of the local league, Mohammedan Sporting defeated Kalighat in its last match 4-1 to become the first Indian winner of the Calcutta Football League. Having tasted victory once, the club thirsted for more. It con-

**T**he Thirties was indeed a golden era for Mohammedan Sporting. Thereafter, it has won major tournaments in the country, but never again with the same authority or ease—and certainly not continuously. But the club's contribution has to be viewed in the overall context of Indian sport.

Mohammedan Sporting always relied on quality fare and for this, did not hesitate to get players from other countries as well. Before Partition, players would come from what is now Pakistan, on a regular basis. The illustrious names include that of Omar. Now, there are players brought from countries like Iran.

Although football has always been the focal point of attention, the club has had many successes in cricket too. And these came towards the early part of this century and have continued through the years. The club has also contributed to games like hockey and,



of course, athletics.

The club shifted to its present premises on the Maidan in 1938. In the early days, accommodation wasn't a problem because the important matches were always played on the Calcutta Football Club ground which now houses Mohun Bagan. But, in today's context, the accommodation of barely 14,000 spectators is wholly inadequate. Constant pleas—to both the police and military authorities who own the area—yielded nothing.

But more serious is the problem of membership. Despite all its achievements, the club has never built up a core membership which stands by the club in difficult days. Members enroll annually only when the football season starts. Sometimes it doesn't even reach a thousand. Even here, the club's pleas to allow more membership—as has been done for the other two big clubs—have also not been heard.



**The centenary celebration gets underway**

The club's main drawback, however, is the politics within. Today, there are broadly two groups which are trying to control club affairs. A compromise was attempted last year, but the dissident group withdrew alleging large-scale defalcation of funds. Several court cases have further vitiated the atmosphere.

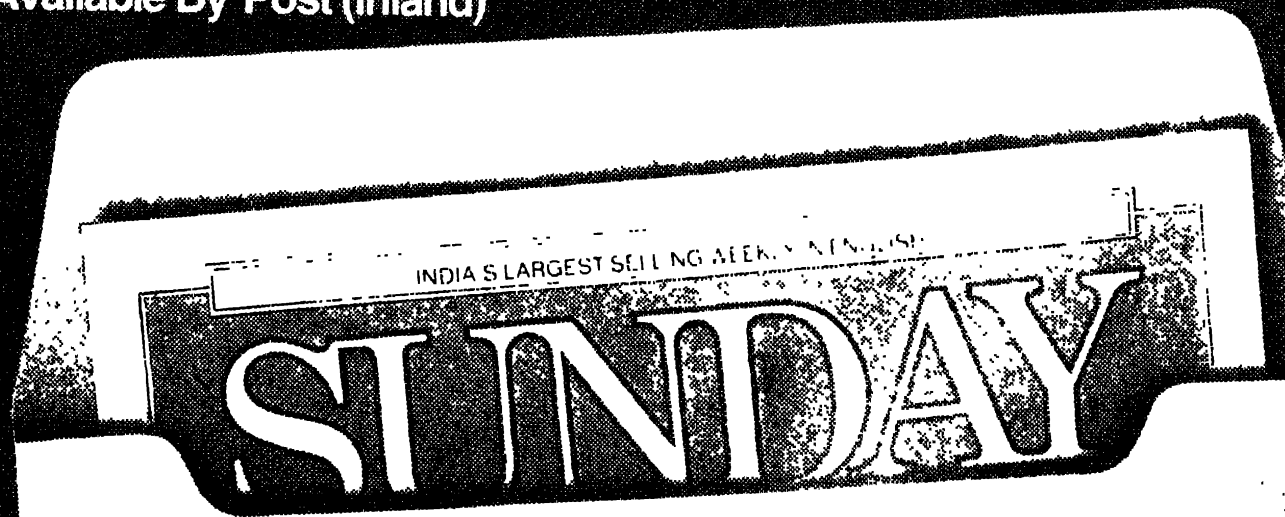
Despite all this, the club has drawn up great plans for its centenary celebrations. It started with a

"Walk for Peace", which drew people from all communities, clubs and political stalwarts of West Bengal. Now, there are plans for a *mushaira* and a filmstars' nite, to garner funds for sports events. There are also plans to stage an international invitation football competition. The club also proposes to hold a cricket match between India and Pakistan. One of the more novel and praiseworthy efforts is the plan to stage a junior club-level competition.

With all these on the anvil, Mohamadan Sporting is now going great guns. But the quarrels within will have to be solved quickly, so that the centenary becomes an affair to remember. Also, after a hundred years of constant service to the cause of sport in the country, the club will have to think seriously about changing its name to fit more meaningfully into the national scene. •

**Arjit Sen/Calcutta**

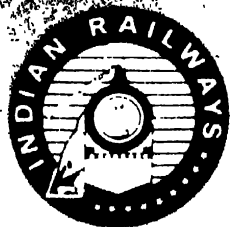
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Grappling for the scientific hold, getting it and pinning down the opponent. Hands raised in victory. Resounding applause. *Bishamber Singh, Radhey Shyam, Data Ram, Panna Lal Yadav, Jharkhandey Rai, Naresh Kumar, Rohtas Singh, Gian Singh, Sunil Dutt, Kuldeep Singh, Mohd Javed Satyawar and several others*

Each one of these stalwart wrestlers wore the Railway colours with pride and served the nation with distinction.

All evoke nostalgic memories, reflect the indomitable will to win and inspire us to reach new pinnacles of glory.

In the sports arena the Indian Railways have an enviable record — winning over twenty national sports championships each year. Every fourth 'Arjuna' awardee represents the Railways! This symbolises the fortitude, physical fitness and team spirit among the 16 lakh-strong family of the Indian Railways.

Yes, the Indian Railways have an unbeaten track record as the largest in Asia, carrying 11 million passengers and nearly 10 lakh tonnes of freight over a distance four times to the moon each day. Higher productivity and greater public service are only a few of the milestones that the Indian Railways are reaching.

The endeavour to excel continues unabated as the Indian Railways echo the sportspersons dream of 'Swifter! Higher! Stronger!!!'

# INDIAN RAILWAYS

## CHAMPIONS OF THE TRACK





## A VIP wedding



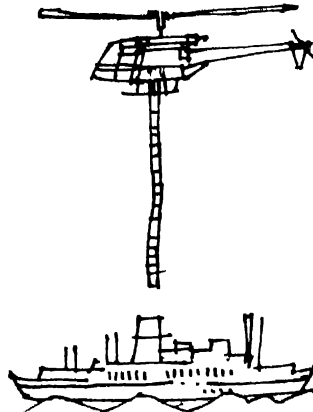
■ No, it wasn't what every woman dreams of. The wedding was all set. The groom's parents were not cribbing. The bride had a shy little smile as she sat wrapped in full bridal finery in the car. But fate wouldn't let her have it so easy.

The place was Amritsar, the time—the day Prime Minister V P Singh got there for the all party rally. The wedding site was a guest house on Court Road, which had been sealed off to allow the PM to pass safely to Jalianwala Bagh. All was well till the PM's security personnel refused to allow the bride's

car to cross the VIP route. Left with no alternative, the bride stepped out of her car. The security personnel escorted her with the stiff gravity characteristic of policemen. The rather embarrassed bride tripped gently across the street, resplendent in red and gold. However, as it turned out, the bride was not alone in her embarrassment. The groom, too, underwent the same treatment. With such security from the very start, the marriage is sure to work out!

## Herculean effort

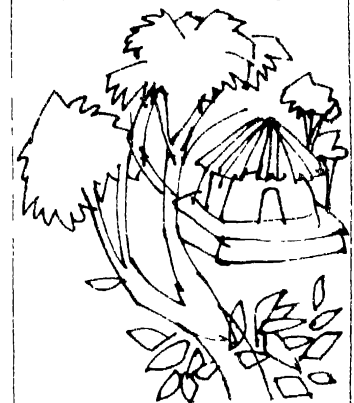
■ It was a historic rescue operation by any standards. And one that obviously deserved a national award. Commander Pradeep Dixit, a pilot of the Indian Navy, was recently given the Saurya Chakra for rescuing the scientist Dr Shekhar Jain. While a rescue act might not be considered unusual, what is indeed stupendous is the magnitude of the entire operation.



Dr Jain, who was suffering from perforated duodenal ulcer and needed treatment, had to be flown from Polar Bjorn, an Indian ship afloat in the Antarctic Ocean, to a German ship 115 kms away. No mean task this, since the distance is way above the navigation limit of 20 kms that a Chetak helicopter can take in polar conditions. The following day, Dixit undertook the same risky operation to bring in a number of much-needed life saving drugs. And the brave pilot did not stop at that. He transported the doctor of the Indian ship too!

## Damned village

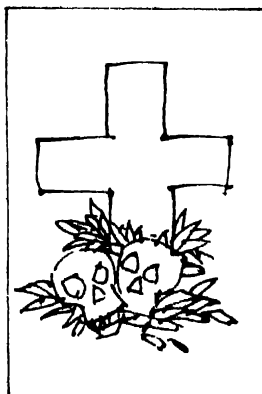
■ It is known as the "village of widows". Pabla is a small hamlet in Orissa's Dhenkanal district comprising women whose husbands have died under mysterious circumstances. During the last few years, most of the members of this village have been gripped by fever and diarrhoea followed by death. What is very strange is that the mysterious illness has only afflicted the male population of the village.



Outsiders are now unwilling to establish matrimonial relations with the members of this village, calling them a "cursed" lot.

## THIS INDIA

**TRIVANDRUM:** Two patients died at the Government General Hospital after they were administered phenol instead of the dose of liquid paraffin prescribed for them. The disinfectant was administered by a nursing assistant who till recently was a sweeper. No action was taken even after the condition of the patients worsened. Much later, an attempt to save the two proved futile—*The Telegraph* (D.N. Rajan, Thane)



ILLUSTRATIONS: ANUP RAY

**TIRUNELVELI:** Shanmugavalli Nadar of Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu applied for a power connection for a pumpset on his farm 25 years ago. He succeeded in his endeavour after his grandson was born recently. According to 62-year-old Nadar, his application had been rejected repeatedly by the Electricity Board

on some pretext or the other. But he had remained undeterred and was recently rewarded with the power connection—*The Statesman* (R. Krishnaswami, Bangalore)

**RAJKOT:** The police here has unearthed a racket of 'dummy' candidates who have been answering examinations for law students of the Saurashtra University. According to the deputy commissioner of police, a private building near the examination hall was being used by the 'dummies' as an "alternative examination hall" for writing answer sheets while the real candidates were sitting in the official examination hall—*Indian Express* (Rajneesh Batra, Allahabad)

**GIRIDIH:** Generosity does not pertain to the rich. This was proved by a Huro Barhi, a beggar. Barhi saved all his money in a bank and pledged it to the Prime Minister's relief fund in the event of his death. When the beggar died recently, a sum of Rs 4,396.95 had accumulated—*The Times of India* (R. Shah, New Delhi) •



BEGINNING 13 MAY 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



You will be rewarded for your diligence this week. However, be on your guard against deception. Do not be hasty in taking decisions. Your friends and relatives will be helpful to you. Take care of your health.

**Good dates:** 13, 15 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 7  
**Favourable direction:** North

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



Be on your guard against treachery and deception. Avoid disputes with friends, relatives and employers. The time is not right for making a change in your professional career. Businessmen should take it easy.

**Good dates:** 15, 16 and 18  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** South

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This will be a week of mixed fortunes. Do not embark on new ventures for you may suffer some financial losses. Be cautious on the professional front. Job opportunities will be available for the unemployed.

**Good dates:** 14, 17 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 5, 7 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** West

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



The week will be a period of trials and tribulations for you. Be patient for this phase will soon pass over. You will have to spend a lot of money on your family members. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 16, 18 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** East

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



Financially there might be some problems this week. But they will be resolved by your partner or spouse. They will be able to help you out with proper advice. A good week for speculation.

**Good dates:** 13, 16 and 17  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 7  
**Favourable direction:** North

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



Your hard work will be rewarded with success. Success on the professional front is assured. But you are advised to be patient in your dealings with your superiors. A hectic social week lies ahead.

**Good dates:** 15, 16 and 17  
**Lucky numbers:** 6, 8 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** South

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



For businessmen, the period is not good for new deals. Do not get unduly worried over losses in speculative ventures. The stars are favourable for matrimony. Children will contribute to your happiness.

**Good dates:** 16, 17 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 7  
**Favourable direction:** West

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



A difficult week lies ahead of you. For those in business, new ventures may not materialise. Be diplomatic and tactful in dealing with others. Disputes may arise between you and your employer.

**Good dates:** 14, 15 and 17  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** East

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



This will be a hectic week for you. You should gear up your energy for this purpose. The time is particularly favourable for those with literary or artistic pursuits. Your seniors and superiors will be helpful to you.

**Good dates:** 13, 14 and 16  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** North-west

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



The stars do not seem to be favourable for you. Be tactful, patient and extremely cautious in whatever you do. Avoid criticising others. A new friendship with a person from the opposite sex will prove beneficial to you.

**Good dates:** 14, 16 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 5, 6 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** South

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



Lack of funds may prevent you from implementing some of your desires this week. The period is favourable for all those seeking employment. Love and matrimonials are in the offing.

**Good dates:** 16, 17 and 18  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3, and 5  
**Favourable direction:** West

## PISCES (21 January—20 February)



This is a prosperous week for you. Those in service are likely to get a promotion. For businessmen, the time is right for new deals. Speculators will be successful. Be careful in your dealings with the opposite sex.

**Good dates:** 17, 18 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 5 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** North-west

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—LEO

*The partners seem to be made for each other. But at times the Leo's sense of pride might come in the way. They should be practical in their approach to life and by doing this they will be able to deal with any tension that might arise.*



## Joy rides

■ The Raja had grave reservations about using government aircraft during the Assembly elections. But, obviously, he doesn't feel the same way when it comes to attending family weddings. Recently, the Prime Minister flew to Lucknow in an Indian air force plane to attend the nuptials of his niece.

Then, stretching the point even further, he flew the air force Boeing to the UP capital yet again to put in an appearance at the wedding of the younger brother of a state government plane's pilot. Apparently, the elder brother had flown VPS around when he was the UP chief minister.



V.P. Singh: fly by right

Each trip cost the air force approximately Rs 3 lakhs. That, without including the other expenses incurred on making arrangements for a prime ministerial visit.

## Never mind his language

■ He banned the use of English in Uttar Pradesh government offices. But even chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav wasn't chauvinistic enough to send his only son Akhilesh to a Hindi-

HEARD AT THE VISAKHAPATNAM STEEL PLANT

**Either he is very vain, or very cool.**

AN OFFICIAL COMMENTING ON V P SINGH KEEPING HIS FUR CAP ON WHILE INSPECTING THE BLAST FURNACE



Mulayam Singh Yadav: exceptions prove the rule

medium school. Instead, the scion of the Yadav *khandaan* studies in a Sainik Public School in Rajasthan, where the medium of instruction is English.

How does Mulayam Singh reconcile this with his now-famous *Angrezi-phobia*? Simple. He publicly

announces that he will withdraw Akhilesh from his present school and enroll him in one where the young lad will be taught in his *matribhasha*.

But if Akhilesh's interview to a Lucknow daily is anything to go by, papa has failed to deliver on his

## GROUCHO-TALK

*How the Indo-Anglian writers rate*

■ **Salman Rushdie:** Still the big star. His agent is now hawking his new book around but relations with Viking have hit rock-bottom over the cancelled *Satanic Verses* paperback.

■ **V. S. Naipaul:** He's never sold as many books as Rushdie, though he still remains the only writer of Indian origin who is likely to win the Nobel Prize. His book on India is out in a couple of months.

■ **Hanif Kureishi:** A massive PR drive has sent *The Buddha of Suburbia* into the bestseller lists. Understands the West and remains the man to watch.

■ **Farrukh Dhondy:** His new book is out this month. Is better known as a television commissioning editor than as a novelist now—perhaps with some justification.

■ **Anita Desai:** A slight fall in the trendy stakes after the relative failure of her last two novels. Remains a solid and substantial presence nevertheless and could bounce back.

promise. The younger Yadav is still on Sainik Public School's rolls; though he does maintain, for the record, that English is strictly no-no.

## More power to the rolling pin

■ First we had the Green Brigade, which earned quite a few headline mentions during the Meham byelection. And now, the All India Mahila Congress Committee has decided to launch the Kitchen Brigade not to be confused with the Kitchen Cabinet.

Set up at the district level, every unit of the Kitchen Brigade will have



Kumudben Joshi: enter, the Kitchen Brigade

around 500 members who will organise *dharnas*, processions and demonstrations against the various ills of the Raja's *sarkar*, with the inevitable *belan* (rolling pin) in their hands.

The Brigade is the brainchild of the Mahila Congress president Kumudben Joshi and Major Mohini has been placed in charge of the newly-formed organisation. Its first agitation will be launched on the issue of price rise. And no, Pramila Dandavate will not be leading this *morchha*. •



## Home is where the heart is

Now that Prime Minister V.P. Singh has shifted into Race Course Road—Vinod Pande and the stars willing—who is going to occupy his bungalows at 26 and 28 Lodhi Estate? None other than newly-elected Rajya Sabha MPs Som Pal and Rajmohan Gandhi.

If one goes strictly by the book, neither of these members are entitled to such accommodation: the average junior MP occupies poky little government flats.



**Rajmohan Gandhi: prize accommodation**

But there's nothing average about either of these men. While Som Pal is the Raja's butler, chauffeur and odd-job man rolled into one, Rajmohan Gandhi is the Dal's favourite sacrificial lamb, after his brave performance in the Amethi poll.

So, Gandhi and Som Pal will move into the palatial bungalows, on which the urban development ministry has spent Rs 50 lakhs over the last five months (ever since the Raja became Prime Minister).

Buta Singh is the biggest loser in this allocation drama. Apparently, he had been promised one of these bungalows, as large amounts had been spent on the security arrangements surrounding them. And everyone knows that the former home minister is a

HEARD IN HARYANA BHAVAN

## Are there any BJP leaders in China?

DEVI LAL, ON BEING ASKED IF HE WOULD TALK TO COMMUNIST LEADERS IN CHINA

prime target of Khalistani terrorists.

But the Raja decreed otherwise.

## Why blame Jaitley?

The Bofors story in last week's SUNDAY may have inadvertently given the impression that additional solicitor-general Arun Jaitley leaked the story about the ownership of the sixth account to Stockholm's *Dagens Nyheter*.

This, says Jaitley, is simply not true. He reached Sweden three days after the *Dagens Nyheter* story appeared. How could he have planted it?

As unfounded are rumours that he will be flying to Stockholm for Ajitabh Bachchan's case against *Dagens Nyheter*. "People are saying that I will appear for the paper," says Jaitley. "How can I do that? I'm a law official of the Indian government."

Nor will he be a witness in the hearings in Stockholm or London. "I am not the source for that story. In

## FRIENDS

*Some relationships that rarely hit the headlines*

### ■ Madhu Limaye and Dhirubhai Ambani:

Limaye knew Ambani long before he became a mega-millionaire. The friendship survives though he is the only Ambani-buddy in politics who has never espoused Reliance's cause or taken Dhirubhai's money.

### ■ Bal Thackeray and Amitabh Bachchan:

When Bachchan was ill in 1982, a Shiv Sena ambulance helped save his life. Since then, the two men have grown personally close and help each other. Both are emphatic, however, that the relationship is not political.

■ **Sharad Pawar and Nusli Wadia:** Way before Pawar first became chief minister in 1978, he was a friend of Wadia's (through Rajni Patel). Since then, both men have been up and down, but they've kept in touch.

■ **Arun Nehru and Lalit Suri:** They are on different sides now and Suri has succeeded Nehru as the Congress' bagman. But there was a time when the Sumitomo wheeler-dealer was Nehru's protégé. They continue to be buddies—outside of politics.

■ **Satish Sharma and S.P. Hinduja:** The Captain flew the Hinduja into Race Course Road and though he was courted by the likes of Rajen Pillai and Abhay Oswal, his heart belonged to Srichand. He attempted to distance himself from them late last year but the bonds were too strong.

fact, I myself want to know where *Dagens Nyheter* got its information from. So, how can I be a witness?" he asks.

## Cousin cousin

Rumours to the effect that the Arun Nehru faction of the Janata Dal intends to rejoin the Congress(I) continue to make the rounds of Central Hall. The evidence for these is—admittedly—extremely slim. It rests on two events.

• The Nehrus invited Priyanka Gandhi to their daughter's birthday. Priyanka did not attend but sent a gift.

• On Friday, 4 May, 1990, Arif Mohammad Khan turned up unannounced at



**Arun Nehru: slim evidence**

Rajiv Gandhi's office in Parliament. When Rajiv saw him, he was surprised and asked, "What are you doing here?" "Just came to say hello," said Arif. "Fine, come in," said Rajiv.

The rest of the conversation took place in private so the rumour mill isn't too sure of what transpired, but it was enough to get the gossips rushing around Central Hall, retelling the story.

Slim evidence? Of course. But of such things are New Delhi's rumours made. ●



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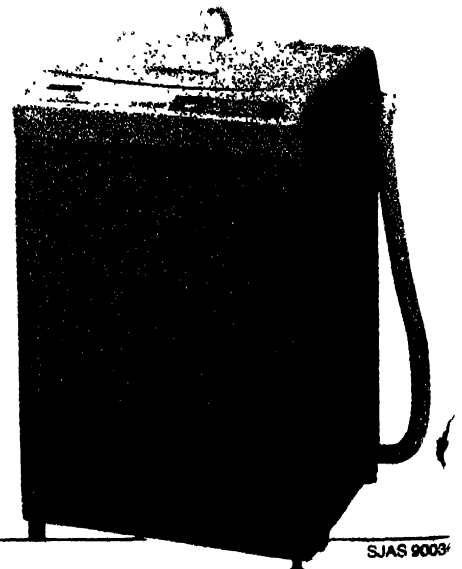
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20 MAY 1990 / THE NEW YORK TIMES

**DEVI LAL : CALLING THE SHOTS**

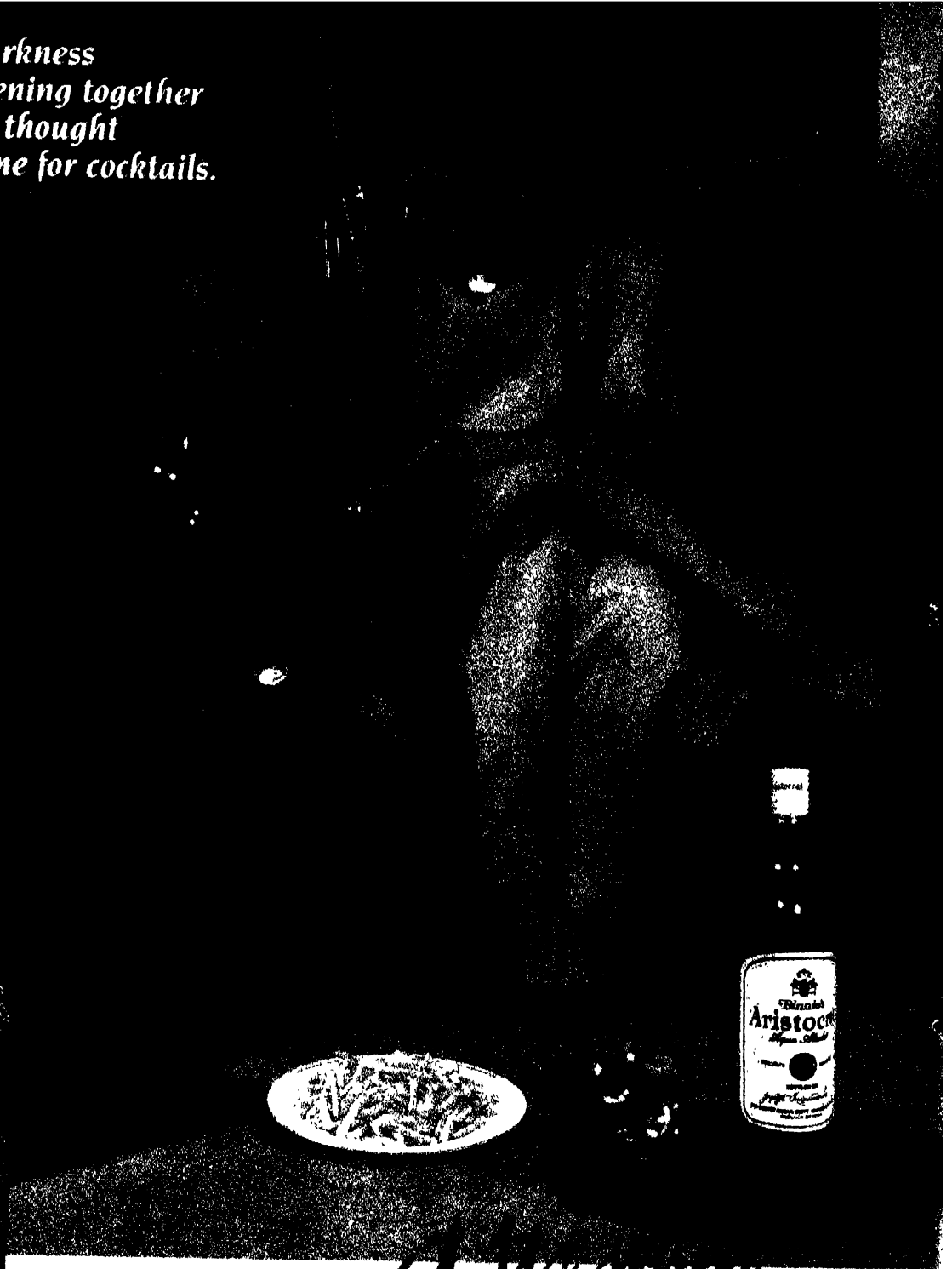
# SUNDAY



**THE OCEAN  
FELICITY**



Gathering darkness  
A quiet evening together  
An unspoken thought  
And it's time for cocktails.



*Aristocrat. The name  
the good life is all about.*

\*Cocktail: Preparation of food and as an aperitif



# SUNDAY

VOLUME 17 □ ISSUE 28 □ RS 7.00  
AN ANANDA BAZAR PUBLICATION  
20—26 MAY 1990



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Sundays will never be the same again. TV's *Mahabharat* draws to a close.



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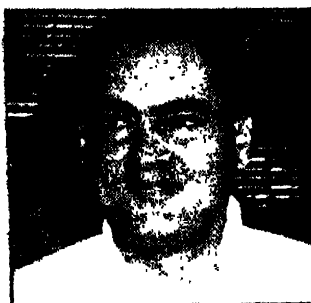
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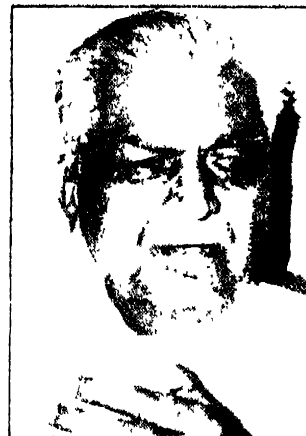


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**Cover transparency:**

Gautam Patole

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## Babu power

**T**he tremendous manipulative skills which the babus have acquired (*Rule of the babu*, 29 April—5 May) over the years, have also been utilised to undermine many other highly specialised departments of the Government of India, an example—the Geological Survey of India

Despite the fact that it has discovered minerals worth hundreds of rupees for the nation, this organisation like many of its kind, remains sadly subservient to the administrative services. More than 2,000 highly experienced scientists (of national and international repute) have to look towards a powerful lobby of "babus" for policy formulation regarding not just departmental decisions but even their own careers because this "lobby" heads the management board of the survey and is the cadre-controlling authority of the geoscientists

As a result, hundreds of scientists have achieved none or one promotion in their entire life—a service length ranging upto 25 years. This is in stark contrast to the service conditions of any IAS officer who is assured of at least three promotions in the first 17 years of his career. Moreover the deliberate placement of an IAS officer as head of the personnel

management section of highly specialised organisations like the Geological Survey, where every scientist is a specialist in one field or the other undermines the position of the latter.

You deserve all credit for exposing the growing ill effects of the "babu power". This will definitely help in raising the low morale of the best of the scientific brains of the nation and in creating public opinion against a system which is gradually eroding the functional structure of many a prestigious organisation in the country  
*V. Bhattacharjee, Shillong (Meghalaya)*

■ It is true that I had gone into the room of Shri Gopi Arora on my way back after a Cabinet meeting as I wanted to remind him of an important matter concerning my ministry. I did not ask for an appointment with him either at his residence or in his office. The humiliating conversation and behaviour reported to have taken place between

me and Shri Arora as put in quotes by the story writer is totally false, concocted and mischievous. This type of inventive journalism of fabricating falsehood to demigrate a person in public life is to say the least disgraceful. The journalist did not have even the elementary courtesy to verify the facts with me before writing the scandalous part alluded to me

*Vasant Sathe, MP, New Delhi*

■ The write-up was impressive, realistic and comprehensive. Gone are the days when the civil services could boast of honest, dedicated officers like late Grijja Shankar Bajpai, L. K. Jha, K. P. S. Menon etc. Today IAS cadres seem to be more interested in power, money and all the paraphernalia of a pampered class than in the responsibility their job requires

Unfortunately, today our bureaucracy consists of a bunch of opportunists

*Bhupen Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)*

## The archetypal babu : a pampered class



**Devi Lal: de facto PM**

## Puppet on a string

**D**evi Lal seems to be the *de facto* PM in the new government, and V. P. Singh, simply a puppet in his hands (*Devi Lal and sons Pvt. Ltd.*, 18—24 March). It is time our Prime Minister did something to curb the whims of the Tau. As a Prime Minister, it is Singh's duty to exert himself and take decisions independently. If he continues to be swayed by the Tau's pressure tactics, it won't be long before he finds himself out of power

## Expose the culprits

**T**his refers to the report on the leakage of question papers at La Martiniere for Girls (*School for scandal*, 1—7 April). Gracy Abraham is shouting herself hoarse, but is not above reproach. It is obligatory on the part of the supervising examiner to report to the ICSE convenor in case there is any irregularity in the examination procedure. If Abraham found that the seal of the question papers had been tampered with, she should have reported the matter to the convenor immediately. What took her so long to take action? Her contention that the school's principal prevented her





**La Martinlere for Girls: in the eye of the storm**

from doing so is preposterous to say the least. The entire incident has been masterminded by a teacher who has set her eyes on the principal's post. She was aided in the incident by a small group of teachers who too would like the principal to resign. It is time the detective department came up with the names of the guilty and cleared the name of the school.

**Santi Das, Arup Chatterjee, V. Wasif, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

## Unfair allegations?

I have come across your article on Bofors in SUNDAY issue of May 6, 1990. While giving the list of names under the heading *The suspects*, you have referred the name of some 'Bhupinder Singh' as follows: "Identity not confirmed. Could be the former STC chief."

I read this with great anguish and pain. This has caused me considerable agony and mental tension and has hurt me deeply, both personally and professionally. Just by having a similar name of someone else, you cannot create a doubt in the minds of people and the society and cause damage to the reputation of a professional manager like me. There are hundreds of 'Bhupinder Singhs' in India or may be

even abroad. In STC itself, there were three persons with this name. Without any evidence of verification, logic or basis, you have pointed an accusing finger at me. This is highly unethical, malicious, misconceived and false. I must assert and categorically say that I have had nothing to do in any manner whatsoever with Bofors arms sale to India and in fact hardly heard of this company till the said controversy started appearing in the press a few years back.

I took over as STC chairman and managing director only on 28 December, 1988, i.e. effectively from January, 1989 and remained in STC for a little over 11 months till 18.12.1989. Before this I was in MMTC for 8 years. I have a total of 27 years' career span in private and public sector and am a self-made professional manager, having come up in life through sheer dedication and hard work. I belong to a very respectable, educated and white-collared family where values of life are most important. In such a background, such baseless news items hurt deeply and adversely affect the image in the society.

**Bhupinder Singh, former chairman and M.D., State Trading Corporation of India Ltd (STC)**

*The CBI refused to part with any information about the list of suspects before*

*SUNDAY went to press. It now admits that a list of suspects was submitted but refuses to identify them or to state who the 'Bhupinder Singh' on the list is. Nor does it categorically deny that the former chairman of the STC is the Bhupinder Singh mentioned.*

*In the circumstances, SUNDAY noted "identity not confirmed. Could be the former STC chief."*

*This seems to us to be fair. And as the article noted, there is no prima facie case against many of those listed as suspects. This includes the STC's Bhupinder Singh.*  
—Editor.

## Voice of success

I was happy to learn that Amitabh Bachchan has redubbed for *Agneepath* (*Spotlight*, 15—21 April). Amitabh's deep voice adds to his charisma. The audience is enthralled by his



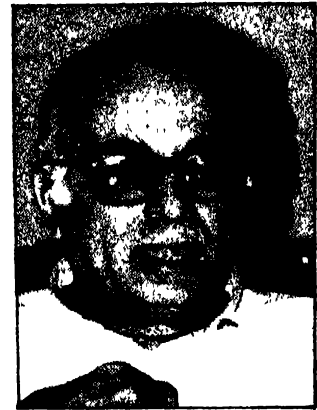
**Bachchan: the baritone is back**

magnetic personality and his deep baritone. *Agneepath* failed at the box office mainly because the audience couldn't accept the superstar's changed voice. Thank god the baritone is back.

**Y.S. Indira, Bhubaneswar (Orissa)**

## The best bet

Kewal Verma's column (*The third alternative*, April 15—21), gives the



**L.K. Advani: able leader**

right perspective. The BJP is certainly emerging as an effective force in Indian politics. The Congress has lost its credibility, the Dal and its alliances have still not achieved unanimity on all issues and internal squabbles persist. Under these circumstances, the BJP stands apart due to its honesty. Any other party would have shamelessly joined the Congress to acquire power and run the government but the BJP seems to be different. Its leaders know what is good for the party as well as for the nation. Besides, the calibre of its leaders is undoubtedly better than any other party and they boast of remarkable unity.

The hostile attitude of our not so friendly neighbour Pakistan, convinces us that the only effective force to combat the hollow shouting from across the border, and to silence it effectively is the BJP. Under the circumstances the BJP seems to be the electorate's best bet.

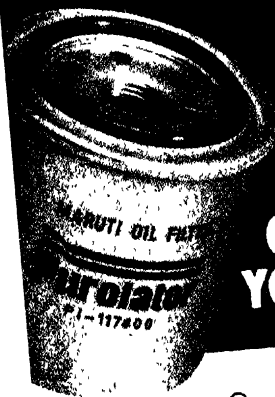
**Prabhakar S. Harsole, Indore (Madhya Pradesh)**

*In the article Rule of the babu (29 April—5 May) P. Umashanker, director of the Indian Institute of Public Administration was inadvertently referred to as a retired IAS officer. He is a serving bureaucrat. The error is regretted.*

—Editor. ●



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# Holding a mirror to India



India has more filmstars-turned-politicians than any other country in the world. Three have been chief ministers of states, there are always at least four in Parliament and many more in Vidhan Sabhas. "Filmstar to politician: a strange, retrograde metamorphosis. As if a butterfly should turn into a caterpillar," writes I. Allan Sealy, author of the epic Anglo-Indian novel *The Trotter-nama* in his work *Hero* (Penguin Viking). Allahabad born Sealy, now living in Dehra Dun, does not admire politicians. Nor really filmstars. He tries to explain the hold, matinee idols have over the populace. He quotes Carl Sagan: "The awe God inspires in man is akin to the awe man inspires in a dog." A filmstar is God; his *chamchas* and people who worship him are dogs. A Prime Minister or a chief minister is God; their ministers and aspirants for ministerial posts are dogs, "their tongues moist, their eyes shifting." Sealy reverses the Indian adage "*Yatha Raja, tatha praja*"—as the ruler so his subjects—to "*Yatha Praja, tatha Raja*"—such the people, thus the king. We Indians being what we are (gullible) deserve the kinds of Prime Ministers, chief ministers and political leaders that we have: M.G. Ramachandran, N.T. Rama Rao, M. Karunanidhi, Amitabh Bachchan, Vajpayanthimala, Jayalalitha, Shatrughan Sinha, Raj Babbar etc.

Sealy begins his story in village Kottagode. The village postman's wife, Rangamma, has a son Ranga born under an auspicious star. Ranga starts his career as an assistant to a cycle and scooter mechanic. Then he joins a circus to become a human canon-ball and falls in love with a silent, undemanding girl, Indu, who forms the apex of a human triangle of three girls on one bicycle. From the circus he moves on to the cinema. His tall figure and slight stoop, his deep bass voice and fluency in Dravidian languages and Hindustani, above all

the infatuation of an established filmstar whom he marries, launches him into stardom. Ranga becomes the Hero in capital letters. His adversary is Nero; his script-writer (Sealy) is Zero. Hero stars in one blockbuster after another, at times appearing in ten different shootings in a day. He knows that a filmstar is in fact a meteor which flashes across the sky for a brief moment or two and dies out. "You don't quit the movies, the movies quit you," he writes. In one of the fight sequences, Hero is shot in the left eye but survives. He takes to wearing dark glasses and rightly concludes while a filmstar's tenure is brief, there is no age limit for a politician. So he puts himself up as a candidate in a by-election, has his film showing him as the god-fearing Raja Harish Chandra screened in all cinemas of his constituency. And wins hands down. Recall the dark glasses worn by M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi, Amitabh Bachchan's accident on the sets and his winning at Allahabad and N.T. Rama Rao as Vishwamitra. A bit of all this goes into the making of Ranga as the Prime Minister of India. From the tiny hamlet Kottagode, to the film metropolis Bombay, to the political capital, New Delhi.

In a dialogue he has Ranga as the Prime Minister mouthing clichés which formed the repertoire of our

past Prime Minister

"Look what we've given the world"

"Zero," I suggested

He flared up, "What?"

"Zero, the decimal system—the foundation of modern mathematics, science, technology."

"Oh yes, and Philosophy."

"The philosophy of zero."

On elections he has this to say:

"The moment the election was called it was every man for himself. The by-election had been a spectacle, a sort of one-day cricket match where the nation watches from the pavilion. The Election Commission, that genteel cricket board, watched helplessly as government vehicles were used for campaigning, vats of election hooch were brewed, and rival *goonda* gangs fought pitched battles. In this electoral match, it was the sponsors who won, whatever the scoreboard might read at the end of the day. The winners strode the field, but afterwards they championed their paymasters."

The halcyon days of Ranga's prime ministership do not last long. There is a succession of monsoon failures, mounting foreign debts and Cabinet colleagues betray him; he shuffles them about. People become restive. He sets up a ministry of truth (false propaganda), a ministry of laughter, a ministry of screens. He begins to harbour grand designs. He moves into the Red Fort, holds darbars in the Diwan-i-Am, acquires a harem of nubile women in the hope that one of them would produce a male heir to ensure a "democratic" dynastic succession. Like Aurangzeb he bans music but like Alamgir his writ does not run beyond his palace to Palam. And like many Mughal monarchs he is assassinated.

"*Hero* is a brilliant satire on present day India. As Sealy ruefully remarks on his way out to India chanting '*Sarey Jahan Say acchcha Hindustan Hamaara*' was written by Iqbal before he had seen the world."

**A filmstar is God; his chamchas and people who worship him are dogs. A Prime Minister or a chief minister is God; their ministers and aspirants for ministerial posts are dogs, "their tongues moist, their eyes shifting"**



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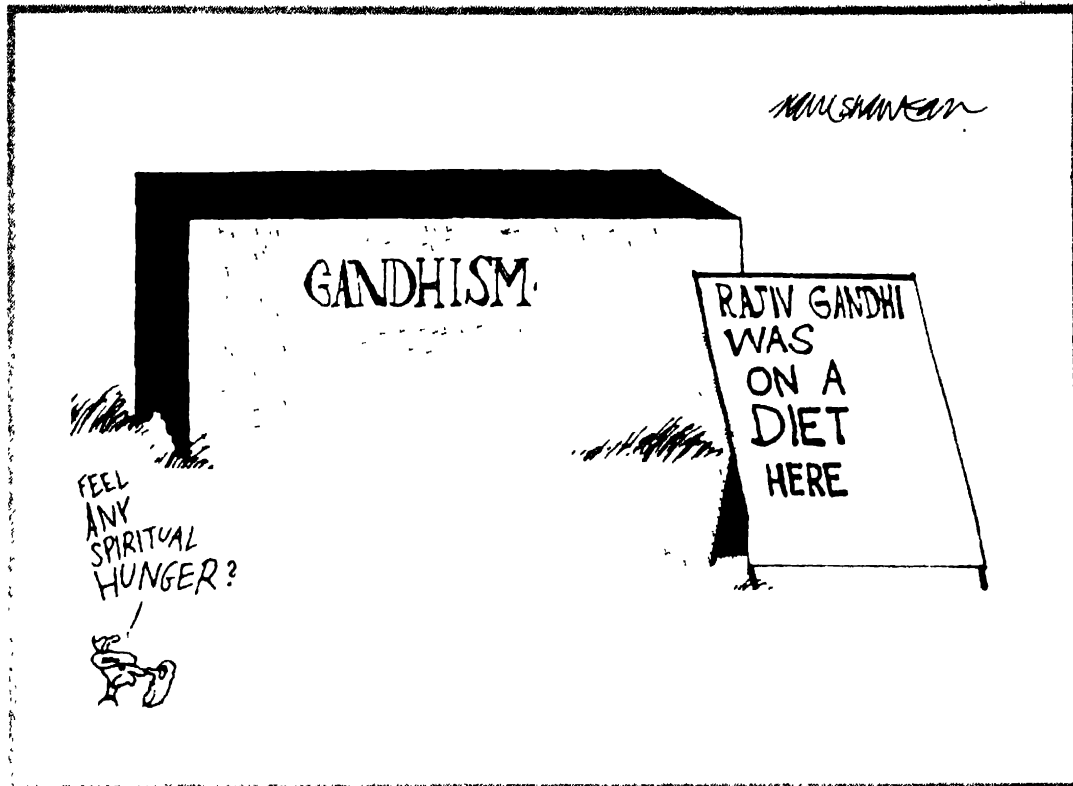
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RAVI SHANKAR/THE TELEGRAPH



■ Persons shouting slogans or religious cries near places of worship in order to incite communal passions should be dealt with firmly.

V.P. SINGH, *Prime Minister, alerting the states on riot threats*

■ The seat of Shankaracharya had always been respected by everyone but this government has broken all traditions. But I am a sanyasi and I can pardon

anyone. I can only pray that better sense prevails in this government.

SWAMI SWAROOPANAND, *Shankaracharya of Dwarka and Jyotirpeeth*

■ If anything damaging appears against our government, we will simply beat up our journalists.

PARENDRA PRATAP SWAIN, *Janata Dal MLA of Orissa*

■ I am willing to knock at even Mr Chidambaram's door.

ARIF MOHAMMAD KHAN, *Union civil aviation minister, on the important 'missing' file pertaining to the Airbus A320 deal*

■ That is a disinformation campaign. Arun (Nehru) is a very good friend. We were together in the Congress. Here too, in the last three years, we have been

together. Arun, Arif and myself. It is a sort of family friendship and association.

MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED, *Union home minister, on whether Arun Nehru is helping the home ministry from behind the scenes*

■ I never want to forget my bad days for they inspire me to do something for others like me.

LALOO PRASAD YADAV, *Bihar chief minister*

■ Yes, I could have suggested the 'Raja Pepsi' name but it never came to mind...I could have suggested Bofors Pepsi also.

SHARAD YADAV, *Union food processing minister, replying to N.K.P. Salve's suggestion that 'Pepsi Lehren' could instead have the brand name 'Raja Pepsi'*

■ I am prepared to meet Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh any time to resolve the Kashmir issue through a dialogue.

BENAZIR BHUTTO, *Pakistani Prime Minister*

■ Marriages happen every day. But a Rekha doesn't happen every day. And when Rekha marries, it has to be in a special sort of way, like every other event in my life.

REKHA, *actress*





# Time to free Rushdie

*How long will the novelist languish and hope?*



Since I was possibly the first journalist in this country to support the demand for the banning of *The Satanic Verses*, it is not entirely inappropriate for me to now propose

that the time has come to revoke the *fatwa* of the late Ayatollah Khomeini and free Salman Rushdie.

For a column writer tapping out his copy in Bombay there are possibly more pressing matters at hand than the fate of a fugitive writer. However, watching Prannoy Roy's *The World This Week*, which carried Rushdie's crisp and clear voice during the course of a BBC radio interview, reminded me of the desperate poignancy of his situation. Salman Rushdie, of course, is not just another writer and *The Satanic Verses* is not just another book. They are the stuff of history. Hardly a day passes when we don't see the novelist's picture in print or read about the myriad controversies he has spawned. Alas, these have staled, courtesy, over-comment and angry rhetoric. Therefore, hearing his voice, listening to him describe how he spends his day, what he misses, how he looks at the future, was a jolting experience—and a chastening one too.

For a man who could be killed if he went out to buy a packet of cigarettes, Rushdie seemed remarkably composed and clear-headed. He claims that he tries to work a "normal" day: he keeps a diary, he is half-way through a children's book, a film script, and at any point of time has at least three books to review. (A notice of Andrew Robinson's biography of Satyajit Ray recently printed in this magazine shows how closely and sympathetically he follows Indian cinema.) In between, he gives interviews and writes extended pieces defending his novel and the artistic premises governing it. He is not exactly idle and neither is he morose, but clearly he is very, very lonely, much more so in the past six months since his wife left him

It is impossible for anyone to imagine the awful and terrifying agony of solitary confinement. You have policemen, a telephone from which you can make a limited number of calls, and a television set. That's all you have for company on the inside. Outside, there is only bad news with fresh demands being made all the time that the *fatwa* be quickly executed. If any other man had been forced to live like this for 15 months, he would have surely gone mad. But Rushdie remains supremely sane, even if he is a trifle less cocky.

Rushdie likes to see himself as a symbol of knowledge fighting the forces of prejudice and ignorance, and insists that critics have misread the book which he emphasises is a work of his imagination. It is not my purpose

here to revive *The Satanic Verses* debate, or to examine the merits of all the self-justifications Rushdie has issued. I still hold that Muslims and secularists are justified in claiming that *The Satanic Verses* is a deeply offensive work. I have, then, no second thoughts on the need for its suppression and I continue to believe that the Rajiv Gandhi government for once behaved with great good sense when it banned the book. Nevertheless, the question to pose now is: how long will the incarceration of Salman Rushdie last? Indefinitely? Or until such time that the internal power-play in Teheran is sorted out?

**H**owever outraged the sensitivities of the Ayatollahs, few intelligent observers deny that in Iran, *The Sata-*

**Salman Rushdie: fighting the forces of prejudice and ignorance**





*nic Verses* has become a political football—one which Khomeini seized with alacrity to strengthen his own position as the true leader of the Muslims, and also to rescue the floundering Iranian revolution, after the disastrous war with Iraq. The *fatwa* of death served Khomeini well, as it does his successors now. Nonetheless, things have changed. President Rafsanjani has begun talking to the great Satan, opening doors to the West, influencing the release of western hostages held in Lebanon, even allowing music and dancing in Teheran. But on the Salman Rushdie question he remains unrelenting. Why?

It seems to me that since the spiritual leaders of the revolution have set themselves up as the guardians and protectors of Islam world-wide, they will find it most inconvenient to even start talking about revoking the *fatwa*. Perhaps five or 10 years from now, when the revolution in Iran is absolutely secure, the plight of the author could be put on their agenda. But, in

the meantime, Rushdie must languish and hope.

There could be a quicker way. Despite assertions to the contrary, pressure on Iran does work, especially if it is behind-the-scenes and if a carrot is dangled at the other end. The Americans, the French, the British have regular channels of communication with Teheran, particularly with those elements in the Rafsanjani government keen to end their country's diplomatic isolation. Unfortunately, for the West, the hostages, oil and arms sales are high priority—not the fate of Salman Rushdie. The West for all practical purposes has dumped him. So, where is the lobbying on behalf of the beleaguered writer to come from? Why not Egypt? Why not the Muslims of the United Kingdom? And why not India?

The *raison d'être* of the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* was to warn the 'infidels' not to trivialise, debase or insult another religion, especially Islam. That purpose has been served. Indeed, the ferocity of the agitation against the book has sent shivers down the spines of western liberals and intellectuals. Freedom of expression is a phrase not heard over much these days. In that sense Iran can claim total victory. But while Allah brooks no nonsense from blasphemers, he is also known to be merciful. Now that he has been avenged, perhaps it is time for his people to be forgiving. Assuming pardon is proclaimed from Teheran, Rushdie could still fall prey to a private bullet looking for private revenge. Thus, the author of *The Satanic Verses* will be a marked man for the rest of his life. Isn't that enough long-term punishment (short-term punishment having already been extracted) for one, admittedly huge blunder?

Consider, too, the almost heroic dignity which Rushdie has displayed during confinement. He is a model prisoner even while furiously exploring all avenues to end his ordeal. In the BBC interview, Rushdie confessed that he did not know what it was that the Iranians wanted to hear from him, what does he have to say or do to be forgiven?

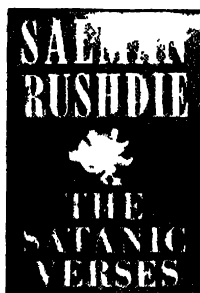
By any civilised standards, Rushdie has paid for his sins. He has been vilified and abused. He has lived in solitary confinement for over 15 months and he has borne with fortitude the idea of random execution. Enough is enough.

**T**he first thing to do is to prod and push the Iranians into revealing the terms of his release. Doubtless, the hardliners will insist that the author grovel and beg for mercy, that all existing copies of the novel be made into a bonfire, and that Margaret Thatcher hand over the 'criminal' so that he can stand trial in Teheran. But, these are not conditions for his release, they are simply a ruse to prolong cruelty.

Sensible and fair terms of release will inevitably involve some form of compromise—a compromise that will allow both sides an honourable retreat. Indeed, Rushdie can be prevailed upon to do more than his share of compromising. But, if the Ayatollahs insist on grinding him to the dust, then he too might harden his stand. At the moment, he seems to be veering towards some kind of a formal apology and his publishers, who are fast abandoning plans for future editions in other languages, might tender some apology too. Fortunately, there are hardly any hardback copies left in the shops. So even if the compromise involves recalling unsold stocks, that should not pose a big problem. Meanwhile, the framing of a mutually acceptable statement of regret is not beyond crafting from a man who makes a living fashioning words. All that is required is that the spirit of compromise on both sides be genuine. Rushdie has indicated that he is ready, only word from Iran is awaited.

We in India have a special responsibility to Salman Rushdie and the book that got him into such deep waters. The Bombay-born author has after all written magically about the land of his birth, India. Indian experience and the subcontinent form a large part of his literary heritage. However, our responsibility to him crosses national frontiers. India was the first country to draw the world's attention to the contents of *The Satanic Verses* and India was the first country to ban it. Thus, it would be in the fitness of things, if we were the first country to ask for a truce.

And wouldn't it be truly stirring if those Indian like myself who were in the forefront of the campaign against the book now come out openly and plead with the Iranians that the time has come to withdraw the *fatwa*, I would enthusiastically join such a campaign. ●



***The Satanic Verses* has become a political football. The *fatwa* of death served Khomeini well, as it does his successors now. It has been used to rescue the floundering Iranian revolution**





KRISHNA SA TH

Swami Swaroopanand

# IN GOD'S NAME?

*Or is it Rajiv's? The Shankaracharya's actions remain enigmatic*



It was billed as the first real test of the National Front government's secular credentials. On 7 May, Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth and Jyotirpeeth, was scheduled to lay afresh the foundation stone for a Ram temple at the disputed Babri Masjid/ Ram Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya. Would the governments in New Delhi and Lucknow allow the ceremony to proceed?

Answer: No way. On 30 April, the Uttar Pradesh administration arrested the Shankaracharya on the grounds of an "apprehension of alleged breach of peace" and on 6 May, it picked up Lal Das, the head priest of the Ayodhya temple complex.

By 7 May, the day the Shankaracharya had designated as D-day, 16 companies of the state armed constabulary and the Central Reserve Police (CRP) had ringed the site to prevent any ceremony from taking place. The area around the masjid/temple was deserted and few Hindus seemed to care that a major ceremony was being

averted by the efforts of the administration.

Afterwards, when the ceremony had been declared a "fiasco" by most of the national press, both UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Prime Minister V P Singh could congratulate themselves that they had reaffirmed their secular credentials and prevented the forces of Hindu obscurantism from deepening the dispute over the temple.

The reality, of course, was not that simple. To begin with, there was the personality of the Shankaracharya

## THE RAM JANMABHOOMI CALENDAR

**1528:** The first Mughal emperor, Zahir-ud-Din Babar, builds a mosque in Ayodhya, allegedly at a site where a temple to Ramchandra stood. In subsequent years, Hindus launch 76 movements to liberate the shrine.

**1855:** A Hindu-Muslim clash over the site leaves 75 dead. Local Hindu and Muslim leaders resolve the dispute by erecting a wall and deciding that members of the two communities will hold prayers at different times of the day.

**3 MARCH, 1951:** A civil judge of Faizabad reverses an earlier court ruling allowing Hindus unfettered rights to offer prayers and hold *darshans*. But in view of the tension, the shrine is closed to both communities.

**APRIL 1955:** Unrestricted rights of Hindus are upheld by a High Court ruling on a petition challenging the 1951 order.

**1983:** Tension builds up over the Ram Janmabhoomi issue as the VHP starts its *ekaitmata yagna*.

**SEPTEMBER 1984:** The Ram Janmabhoomi *mukta yagna* starts. On 7 September, nearly a lakh bathe in the Sarju river at Ayodhya and vow to liberate the Ram Janmabhoomi.

**OCTOBER 1984:** Some Hindu organisations lead a big procession from Ayodhya to Lucknow.

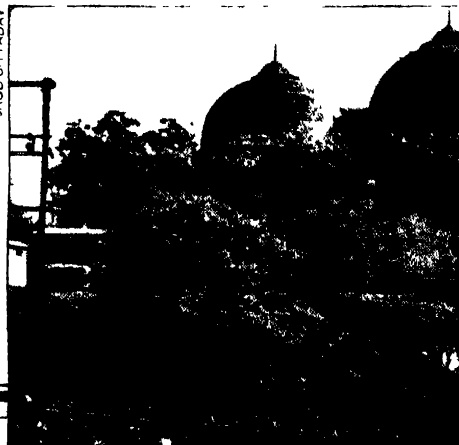
**1 FEBRUARY, 1986:** The original suit of 1951 is dismissed by a district court and the locks of the shrine are ordered open. Violence breaks out and curfew is declared in the walled city of Delhi after a special programme at the Jama Masjid. Riots later break out in Sehore, MP and Kashmir, over the issue of the reopening of the shrine.

**JULY 1986:** Home minister Buta Singh assures the Lok Sabha that the problem will be resolved.

**22 DECEMBER, 1986:** The all-India Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) exhorts Muslims to boycott Republic Day, 1987.

**30 MARCH, 1987:** The biggest post-Independence rally of Muslims is held in Delhi on the Ram Janmabhoomi Babri Masjid issue. Syed Shahabuddin says he wants a return to the *status quo ante* before

JAGDISH YADAV







KRISHAN SAITH

**Swaroopanand's followers court arrest: poor turnout**

himself. While he likes to project himself as a Hindu revivalist bent on preserving the glorious traditions of Ram from being trampled on by heathen minorities and a secular state, his detractors consistently portray him as a Congress stooge.

Certainly, he has very little to do with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which has, so far, been fighting for the construction of a temple in Ayodhya. The VHP had close links with the Bharatiya Janata Party



**Policemen guard the road to the shrine on the day of the proposed shilanyas: tough measures**

(BJP), one of the National Front's supporters, and had threatened to launch its own temple-construction programme on 14 February. V P Singh wriggled out of that potentially explosive situation by convincing the BJP—which, in turn, convinced the VHP—that in the light of the tense situation on the borders, it made no sense to rake up the Ram Janmabhoomi issue now. The VHP then declared that the Raja had four months to make up his mind before it

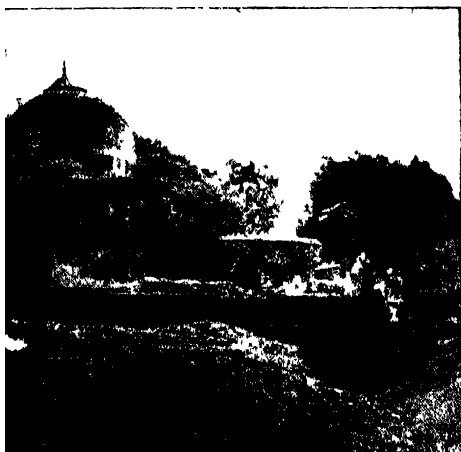
resumed its agitation.

The Shankaracharya's move was widely interpreted as an attempt to force the VHP's hand. While Congressmen deny that the Swami is one of them, he himself has no compunctions about loudly declaring his loyalty to Rajiv Gandhi. ("After all, didn't the [first] *shilanyas* take place during his time?" he asked an interviewer.) The way the VHP saw it, the Congress(I) had put the Shankaracharya up to re-opening the issue to embarrass the

22 December, 1949, and demands that the mosque be declared a national monument.

**7 APRIL, 1987:** The VHP holds a massive rally in Delhi and swears to liberate 100 other temples in the country, where mosques had been built. They reject the idea of a national monument.

**Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid: the dispute rages on**



**19 MAY, 1987:** Week-long rioting in Meerut starts, leaving at least 50 dead and many injured.

**JULY 1988:** Muslim organisations begin to mobilise volunteers to march to Ayodhya.

**14 OCTOBER, 1988:** Muslim leaders exhort their followers to turn the march into a "manifestation of solidarity against chauvinism".

**NOVEMBER 1988:** The BMAC splits after five of its ten members, including the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, decide to hold a meeting to "determine the Muslim stand".

**APRIL 1989:** Atal Behari Vajpayee tells a massive RSS rally that a legal solution to the crisis will not do. The Hindus will settle for nothing short of possession of the shrine.

**MAY 1989:** Buta Singh assures the Lok Sabha that he will resolve the dispute with the help of leaders from both communities.

**JUNE 1989:** Tension mounts in Ayodhya as the first lot of bricks for the *shilanyas* to be held by the VHP arrives.

**JULY 1989:** A division bench of the Allahabad High Court in Lucknow authorises the transfer of all cases from a Faizabad district court to the High Court.

**9 NOVEMBER, 1989:** The VHP successfully holds its *shilanyas* at Ayodhya after the Congress(I) suddenly grants permission.

**FEBRUARY 1990:** V.P. Singh asks for, and is given, four months time to settle the dispute amicably—according to the Janata Dal election manifesto.

**MAY 1990:** The pro-Congress(I) Shankaracharya Swaroopanand Saraswati is arrested by the Janata Dal government of Uttar Pradesh after he attempts to march to Ayodhya to hold a second *shilanyas* ceremony for the Ram temple.



VHP. Because the VHP is committed to the BJP which, in turn, is committed to keeping the National Front in office, it cannot display the kind of fervour it did last year. But with the Congress(I) in Opposition, the Shankaracharya suffers from no such constraint.

It is significant that when the Swami was arrested, only Vijayaraje Scindia, the most rabid of the BJP's leadership, openly expressed her regrets. At the BJP's mammoth New Delhi rally, L K Advani ignored the issue and while A B Vajpayee said that the Shankaracharya should not have been arrested, he hastened to add that he shouldn't have followed this course of action either.

So, for both V P Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav, the opportunity to arrest the Swami and to foil his *shilanyas* was—literally—a godsend. On the one hand, they could demonstrate their secular credentials and on the other, they could gleefully sabotage the Congress(I)'s attempt to get some mileage out of the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy.

**W**hy did the Shankaracharya's attempt to carry out a second *shilanyas* fail when the one sponsored by the VHP in November 1989 was such a success? "The Shankaracharya has no organisation that can match the strength and resources of the VHP. It is all very well to claim that he has the support of many leading *mahants* and *sadhus*. But can he hope to match the cadres of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal and the mass contacts of committed BJP and RSS workers?" asks a Faizabad journalist.

"The *mahants* lead comfortable lives in their houses and have little to do with the common people," says the scribe, explaining why they have virtually no influence over the people. Ram Chander Das Parmahans of the Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti feels that the very factors that the Shankaracharya's followers have been claiming as his "strengths"—the fact that his organisation is purely religious, has no "political links" and is untainted by charges of communal violence—are what make him seem detached and unconcerned and account for his alienation from the people. Being politically neutral is not the same as being callous. Apart from a ten-day trip to Ayodhya in March this year, the Shankaracharya had not visited the place again. "So how on earth could he hope to conduct as

**H**andled correctly, the Shankaracharya could prove to be a formidable opponent for the VHP. His arrest has given him national prominence and a measure of credibility

elaborate a programme as the *shilanyas*?" asks a journalist. "He should have used all this time to intensify his base and resources."

Another factor that led to the failure of the Shankaracharya's program-

me was the fact that he had not properly chalked out a plan. The basic logistics of the *shilanyas* had not been worked out. The Shankaracharya had no blueprint of the proposed temple.

To make matters worse, his disciples issued contradictory statements on whether they would abide by the court's verdict on the contentious shrine. And the Shankaracharya made no attempts to collect funds, leaving the exercise to "God's will", unlike the more pragmatic VHP.

**B**ut has the National Front regime played its cards as well as it should have? One view is that it has only succeeded in raising the Shankaracharya to greater prominence.

In Ayodhya at least, the Shankaracharya's camp represents a real alternative for those who are fed up with the VHP. Certainly, the VHP has the support of nearly everybody who

## Shilanyas? What shilanyas?

*They caused more of a stir in the papers than in Ayodhya*

**O**n 7 May, the day the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth and Jyotirpeeth, Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, was planning to lay afresh the foundation stone for the envisaged Ram temple at the disputed site, the twin towns of Faizabad and Ayodhya presented contrasting pictures. The predominant mood in Faizabad was one of nonchalance. "I didn't even know such a function was going to take place until I heard of it in the national news on TV last night," said a professor of a local college. "This perhaps typifies the reaction of the average Hindu, who is rather detached from the whole issue. But the feelings among the Muslims are different. They know when the ceremony was supposed to take place, who was overseeing it, how many people were expected to attend," said Shri Krishna Singh, the editor of a left-leaning local daily, *Hum Aap*.

But the Shankaracharya's arrest and the tight security arrangements in Ayodhya instilled a modicum of confidence in the Muslims of Faiza-

bad.

Ayodhya seemed to be under an undeclared curfew. The lanes leading to the disputed shrine were deserted and visitors were debarred from entering the place. The normally aggressive members of the VHP kept a low profile and were nowhere in sight on that day. "We wanted to leave nothing to chance," said a district official. "What if Lal Das or anybody else for that matter had entered the sanctum sanctorum and had simply placed some harmless-looking stones and pebbles and chanted an appropriate *mantra* and then declared that the *shilanyas* was over? These people are capable of anything."

But now, it seems as if the UP administration acted over-zealously, over-estimating perhaps the strength of the Shankaracharya and his followers. In fact, the government's actions have resulted in much publicity for the Shankaracharya, who does not have much of a following in Ayodhya. "His arrest has made the Shank-



counts in the temples of the Ayodhya region

The Shankaracharya represents an ideal option for those ignored by the VHP because his religious credentials are impeccable. For most Hindus he is a much revered figure who heads two seats of religious authority (*panths*)—the Dwarkapeeth and the Jyotirpeeth.

Bom Pothiram Upadhyaya was born in 1924 at Dighouti village in the Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh. He joined an *ashram* at Varanasi when he was only 12. In 1942 he participated in the Quit India movement and was jailed for nine months. In 1950 he was initiated into the ascetic order by Brahmininidi Saraswati, the then Shankaracharya of Jyotirpeeth.

It also helps his credibility that the Swami combines religious activities

with a missionary zeal and runs two welfare centres at Chaibasa in Bihar and Narsinghpur in Madhya Pradesh (He also claims to 'reconvert' those who have been converted to Christianity).

This makes him—in the long run—a formidable opponent for the VHP. Should his political sponsors handle him correctly. And while the *shulanyas* ceremony ended up being a fiasco, his arctic gave him national prominence and a measure of credibility.

**A**ll this, of course, is quite cynical. Regardless of whether it is Rajiv Gandhi's nominee who stirs up trouble or whether it is J. K. Advani's

protégé who creates the problems, the fact remains that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a time bomb ticking away in the background.

V. P. Singh's approach so far has been to first buy time and then to prevent the Shankaracharya from hijacking the issue. This makes a certain amount of political sense in the short term but brings us no nearer a solution.

Mulayam Singh Yadav has repeatedly asserted that no religious head is above the law. By that reckoning, he should lock up the VHP's *sadhus* and rabble rousers once that agitation gets going. And if he is to be consistent, then he should post another 1.

Shankaracharya a hero," boasted Sita Ram Saran, custodian of the Lakshman Killa temple in Ayodhya and president of the local unit of the Ram Janmabhoomi Punarudhar Samiti and also the Shankaracharya's right-hand man.

Saran and the other disciples of the Shankaracharya, however, come off badly. Even as the Shankaracharya defiantly proclaimed from captivity at Chunar Fort in Mirzapur district that the *shulanyas* would take place and that his supporters would court arrest in thousands, only 126 of them gave themselves up to the police on 6 and 7 May. Most of them had come from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. And the Shankaracharya's two trusted lieutenants in Ayodhya—Sita Ram Saran and Mahant Madhavacharya—weren't among them.

Most amusing was the sight of Ram Ashray Das of the Chowburji temple, who had publicly threatened to immolate himself on the evening of 7 May if the Shankaracharya and his associates were not released by then. That morning, Ram Ashray Das rode around Ayodhya on horseback on a mission to "awaken the Hindus and tell them of the injustices being heaped on the seer". Eventually, he headed for the police station where, of course, he was arrested.



and prevented from implementing his "threat". To save face, he later denied he had ever threatened to immolate himself and claimed that such rumours were part of the 'mischievous propaganda being carried out by the VHP against us'.

The Shankaracharya does not command much of a following in Ayodhya, was also proved by the fact that the temples there were not shut in 'protest' on 7 May as declared earlier. Nor did anyone go on fast. Admitted a follower of the Shankaracharya, "For appearance's sake, we did not host the regular community feasts, but privately, all of us had our routine meals". Priests from the Hanuman Garhi temple, one of the biggest in Ayodhya, who had promised to join the agitators, also chickened out.

All in all, the proposed agitation turned out to be a damp squib.

#### Swami Swaroopanand's supporters with sacred bricks: unsuccessful venture

companies of armed policemen around the site to prevent any VHP inspected ceremonies from getting under way.

But can he afford to do that? It is all very well to dismiss the Shankaracharya as a Congress stooge and to display his scalp as proof of a secular polity, but can the National Front get away with adopting the same attitude to the VHP?

One view is that V. P. Singh believes it can and that when it comes to the crunch, he will tell the BJP where to get off. This may not happen, but if it does, it raises another interesting possibility: what if the Shankaracharya and the VHP join hands? Already, both sides have had tentative contact.

Whichever way you look at it, Ram Janmabhoomi is set to explode within a few months. •

**Radhika Ramaseshan/ Lucknow and Ayodhya**







# Cops and reporters

*The police fail to block Newstrack*

**P**ublicity has its price. When the crew of *Newstrack* followed a police party during a raid on hookers in Delhi's G.B. Road, deputy commissioner of police (DCP), crime, Amodh Kanth didn't seem to object. He had hardly expected them to produce a film that would disgrace the police. But that is exactly what they did—and got away.

The police had conducted the raid with the aim of rescuing children from the clutches of pimps and prostitutes. In the process, they acted tough, while the *Newstrack* cameras were rolling. The crew was excited about getting a good story on police cruelty. But when the film was ready and the police saw what was in it, they asked the Censor Board to order the deletion of the story on the children of prostitutes. The Censor Board obliged. But *Newstrack* challenged the order before the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal. The story was finally passed with minor changes. The police had lost a battle they had never wished to fight.

The tribunal, while clearing the story, declared that nowhere were the children of the prostitutes shown in a manner that they could be identified. The filmmakers had complied with the Supreme Court order in the case—they had concealed the identity of the children to prevent social ignominy—and there was nothing illegal about the film. If the Delhi police didn't like it, they had to lump it. *Newstrack* was jubilant.

On 4 March this year, *Newstrack* had sent its crew to cover a unique raid on brothels in G.B. Road by the police and social workers. The raid was conducted with the aim of picking up children in the area and putting them in a remand home. The idea was to enforce the Juvenile Justice Act, which makes it their duty to put all children found in red-light areas in

remand homes.

So far so good. But during the course of the raid, the *Newstrack* crew found the police mistreating the very children they were meant to rescue. Realising that the public relations exercise had boomeranged on the police, the DCP (crime) began trying to have the film censored.

The idea of the raid originated with a petition filed by a lawyer named Vishaljit. He had met Delhi police commissioner Vijay Karan and told him that he had filed a petition in the Supreme Court, challenging the sale and purchase of human beings. Karan marked the letter to Kanth and instructed him to contact Vishaljit and take action. Says Kanth in a petition before the Supreme Court, "Enquiries were conducted in Shradha Nand Marg (the other name of G.B. Road) and it was found that hundreds of

graphers who had also turned up were disappointed that they "weren't able to take pictures."

"We took away 111 children—79 girls and 32 boys," Kanth says. "Only 17 seemed to have some kind of parental claim and 94 didn't have any at all." The children had been brought to the brothels from different parts of the country. The police picked them up because they appeared to be minors. But government doctors were requested to ascertain their age, find out if they had been sexually abused or physically assaulted and whether they suffered from venereal diseases or AIDS.

The police claim that after this, pressure was built up by the prostitutes, pimps and procurers—numbering about 10,000—for the release of the children. Kanth adds, "A section of the media also criticised the action



**A child being taken away from a kothi in G.B. Road: but many others wait to be rescued; DCP Amodh Kanth: a PR exercise that backfired**



neglected children were living under sub-human conditions in the brothels. They were being forced into prostitution at a tender age."

Finally, on 15 March, 1990, a team of 42 women police officers, three assistant commissioners of police, nine inspectors and social workers who had been working with juveniles stormed the brothels. "Utmost precaution was taken to ensure that the interest of the children was not harmed," Kanth says. A large crowd of people collected to witness the raid. The *Newstrack* crew was there. Press photo-

and misinformed the public, besides publishing photographs, etc."

However, Amodh Kanth claims that the police did not mistreat the children during the raid. The police maintain that *Newstrack's* shots of policemen "mistreating" the children were based on a misinterpretation of what the police had set out to do. If in the process of rescuing the children, they had to use force, it was merely because it was unavoidable. But now that is for *Newstrack's* viewers to judge. •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



# Might is right

*India's handling of Kashmir draws criticism in the western media*

*"Cynicism and an overbearing arrogance have been the hallmarks of India's treatment of Kashmir"*  
—The Independent

*"The chronic instability since 1947 has been largely the fault of India. It has too often acted as a regional bully driving its neighbours to seek alliances with countries hostile to it, and then taking umbrage at such presumption"*  
—The Daily Telegraph

*"Up to 10,000 refugees have crossed into the Pakistan side. They complain of Indian brutality, of curfews so severe that people run short of food and water in their own homes. The Indians have totally shut off their part of Kashmir, but it's clear they've lost the hearts and minds of the Muslim majority. This has the hallmarks of a popular uprising"*  
—Brian Barron, BBC News

"An unknown number of Kashmiri guerrillas are being trained here in Pakistan," continues Barron. "To the Indians, they are terrorists, to Pakistan, Muslim heroes battling oppression. But with Pakistan itself refusing to act as foster mother to yet another Islamic uprising, the Kashmiri dissidents' best hope for aid lies with oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Revolutionary Iran. I understand funds from both the countries are being channelled through a fundamentalist group here with the full knowledge of the Pakistani authorities."

Some of the information contained in the report only seems to prove India's point: that Pakistan is training Kashmiri militants with a view to create trouble across the border. According to Barron, "We found evidence that Kashmiri refugees are already arming themselves. The KLF—Kashmir Liberation Front—

bought these machine guns (on camera) a fortnight ago in a Pakistani state."

While Indian diplomats gleefully quote such reports as evidence of Pakistani complicity on terrorist training, the British press has adopted the concept of the "independent state" as a *cause celebre*. A UN-sponsored plebiscite is generally regarded as the most attractive option. *The Independent*, for example, editorialised "If he is to avoid further bloodshed, V P Singh should be wise enough to accept that the only lasting solution to the Kashmir problem is one that takes into account the wishes of its inhabitants."

The editorial brought a flood of letters, including one from Kuldip Nayar, the Indian high commissioner in London. Nayar clarified that a plebiscite had not been demanded by the United Nations. On the

**A**s far as the British media are concerned, there is only one villain in the current fracas over Kashmir valley: India. And the Pakistani government's public relations exercise—with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto giving numerous interviews to western correspondents blaming India for the mess, and flying press people to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK)—only strengthens this impression.

Most reports on the current dispute appearing in Britain are unfavourable to New Delhi. Take Brian Barron's

telecasts on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), for instance. "Pakistani army generals I've met believe another war with India over territory is inevitable," says Brian, while Pak soldiers are filmed against the bleak snows of POK, shouting "jihad" at the camera.



**Military men patrolling the streets of Kashmir: battling 'Muslim heroes'?**

arms bazaar. The clandestine training of Kashmiri guerrillas on the Pakistani side seems well underway. These men (on camera) are from the KLF. Their revolutionary anthem is called *Kalashnikov*, after the deadly assault rifle. The aim of such fundamentalists is nothing less than their own indepen-

contrary, the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had unilaterally made this offer, in consultation with Lord Mountbatten. Nayar accused Pakistan of making "strenuous and sustained efforts" to internationalise the Kashmir issue, saying that the country's envoys had "spread out across the world in an attempt to raise the issue in a variety of international forums."

But the Nayar letter—strong though it was—only constituted an official defence of India's position. The western media continued to report adversely on the

imposition of curfew in Kashmir and the house-to-house arrests. And the overriding impression of India remained that of a country which was holding on to a state by force; a state which was never its own to begin with. •

**Shrabani Basu/London**

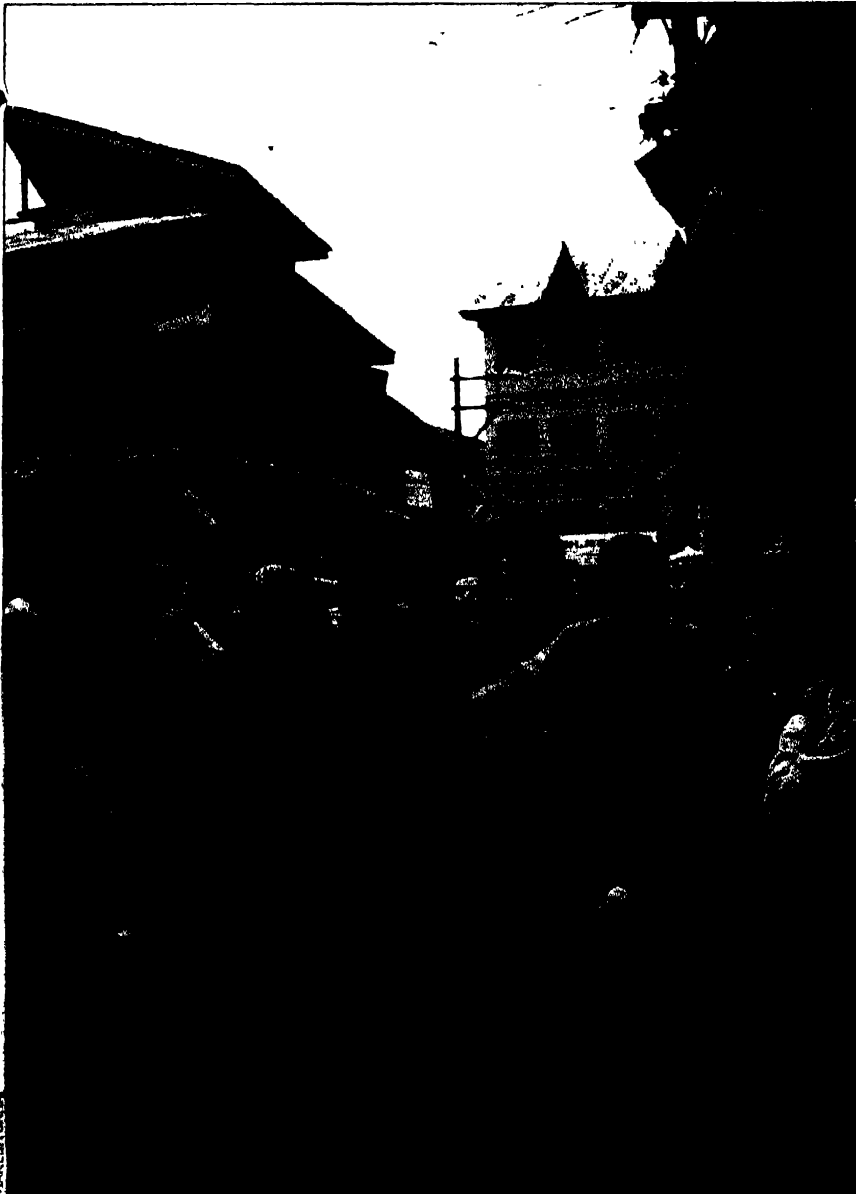


# The itinerant terrorist

*Profiling Amanullah Khan, chairman of the JKLF*



INDRANIL BANERJEE



Kashmiris demonstrating in Srinagar: influenced by the JKLF

**F**or the entire month of April this year, Indian RAW agents in New York and Washington DC were busy tailing a gnarled, bespectacled South Asian. The man could not have looked more harmless with his professorial air, slight limp, and a lined, tired face. But the RAW men would not let up. They shadowed him till the day this man drove to the John F. Kennedy airport and quietly took a flight to Amsterdam. If the RAW men could have had their way, they would have handcuffed him and put him on the earliest Air India flight to New Delhi. But in the United States, the RAW men were more than a little circumscribed: they could hardly go around arresting a person who had entered the country legally. Even if the person happened to be one of the most wanted terrorists in India.

The man who got away was none other than Amanullah Khan, 55, chairman of the terrorist outfit called the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). While in the United States, Khan had addressed press conferences, given interviews and unabashedly declared that his organisation's murderous activities in Indian Kashmir were fully justified. "Everything is justified in war and love," he told a Washington-based journalist. In another interview to a local Indian paper in New York, he had said "Why shouldn't a vice chancellor be killed? Why should V P. Singh not be killed? Why should Rajiv Gandhi not be killed? We will not hesitate if it comes to that."

Khan, while in New York, had announced the killings of Islamic scholar Professor Mushir-ul-Haq and the Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT) general manager H L. Khara a day before their actual execution by JKLF terrorists in Srinagar. Khan's announcement was, in a sense, a signal to the 'boys' in Srinagar. "He was actually preaching the killing of Indian heads of states and other innocent persons at press conferences," says an outraged spokesman of the Indian ministry of external affairs (MEA), Aftab Seth. "The United Nations' premises and the Washington press club were used for preaching terrorism and we were naturally outraged and told the US government so," adds Seth.

Initially, the US government had not been terribly responsive to the Indian government's demand for Khan's extradition. The Indian embassy in Washington was informed



that Khan, a Pakistani passport holder, had a valid five-year, multi-entry visa, and had not broken any US law. When Indian diplomats pointed out that Khan was chairman of the JKLF, an organisation listed as a terrorist outfit by the US government, the US state department replied that it did not have any evidence of his direct involvement in any terrorist activities. That changed when the *munsif* magistrate of Jammu issued an extradition warrant against the terrorist leader for ordering the killing of four Indian air force officers and the director of the Srinagar Doordarshan centre, Lassa Koul. The Jammu magistrate argued that Khan had to be tried in India and should be deported from the United States. The order was based on the confessions of a JKLF 'area commander', Shokat Bakshi, who was arrested by Indian security personnel.

"When the Americans realised what Amanullah was really up to, they were appalled," says Aftab Seth. The Americans then set in motion legal processes to have Khan extradited. But before Khan could be tried in the United States, he took off for Holland. It was an amazing escape and elicited a philosophical parting shot from Amanullah: "I am used to getting deported."

**A**manullah Khan was, of course, referring to his deportation from Britain four years ago—an event that revokes great bitterness. "I got shunted out of England because of India," he had told SUNDAY during an interview in Muzaffarbad, the capital of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). Khan had moved to London in 1976 and had become chairman of the publicity board of the 'Plebiscite Front', an organisation floated by Kashmiri exiles in Britain. "People all over the world had forgotten the Kashmir issue and I began to project the real facts from an independent Kashmiri's point of view," he recalls. The

Indian government, Khan believes, got alarmed at his success and began pressuring the British government.

"The Thatcher government made a deal with the Indians," he says. "The Indian government said it would buy Westland helicopters if the British government banned the JKLF and deported me. And a nation of petty shopkeepers agreed to this sinister bargain," says a bitter Amanullah. That seems to have been the beginning of Khan's sad saga. He retells the story of his ouster from Britain and it is best narrated in his own words:



INDRANIL BANERJEE

"My harassment started when I was arrested by the British police on flimsy grounds. They kept me in the lock-up for two days but had no evidence to charge me. Finally, they discovered some chemicals and pesticides in my house and claimed that this material was being used by me to produce explosives. The British police, which is otherwise famous for its fair play, on that occasion acted like the Pakistani or Indian police and fabricated a story. They arrested a friend of mine and recovered two old Pakistani passports and two British passports

from him and put them in my bag and accused me of trading in forged passports. When the matter was raised in the British Parliament, the charges had to be dropped.

"But for nine long months, justice was denied to me. I was kept under remand for nine months by a country that prides itself in upholding the rule of law: I was treated like a terrorist, kept in solitary confinement. I was finally acquitted by the court on 23 September, 1986. But within three minutes of my acquittal, a pre-signed deportation order was served on me and I was sent back to prison. The British government had already decided that if I was acquitted, I would be acquitted. I was kept for another three months at the notorious Brixton prison and on 16 December, 1986, I was escorted to the airport and forced into an aircraft bound for Karachi. The Government of India had tried to get me

to India but at the last moment my friends approached the courts and stayed my deportation to India."

**H**is life story begins at a small hamlet in the rugged valleys of Gilgit, where his father was a revenue officer. At the age of five, he was packed off to Panpur, a picturesque spot in the Srinagar valley famed for its fields of saffron. Khan moved to Pakistan after India consolidated its hold over Kash-

**"Why should V.P. Singh not be killed? Why should Rajiv Gandhi not be killed? We will not hesitate if it comes to that," says Amanullah Khan**



mir. "I was just 18 years old and lived on my own in Rawalpindi and Peshawar," he says. He financed his own education and finally established a small school in Karachi which eventually grew into a small college. In 1972, he was forced to close the college and the major part of his flourishing school was nationalised by the Pakistani government. That set in motion another round of travels and eventually Khan moved to London in 1976.

What has remained constant for Khan is his determination to liberate Kashmir. His mentor was Maqbool Butt, founder of the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF), who was hanged by the Indian government on 11 February, 1984. Butt had formed the JKNLF in 1965 with the aim of creating conditions in which Kashmiris could determine their own future, that is, decide whether they wanted to be independent or part of India or Pakistan. Butt proved singularly unsuccessful in establishing a base in POK and began to sneak into India to recruit subversives.

The JKNLF functioned as an underground organisation and in 1966, the murder of a police officer was attributed to Butt and his JKNLF. Butt was arrested but managed to escape. During another crossing ten years later, he was re-arrested, tried and then hanged. After Butt's arrest in 1977, Amanullah Khan took over and dropped the word 'National' from the organisation's name. Khan claims that his organisation was compelled to adopt "armed struggle". "We were simply trying to bring to the notice of the world what the real facts on Kashmir are," he says, "but the Indian government could not tolerate this and had me deported from Britain. Then we tried for years to convince India about holding a plebiscite and allowing the people of Kashmir to determine their own future. But we failed and naturally had to turn to armed struggle as a last resort."

Khan is completely convinced of the righteousness of his cause. His fanatical conviction allows him to justify even the most heinous crimes committed by his armed followers in the Srinagar valley. "After all, we are not asking for charity, we are asking for a right we fully deserve and which India has been denying us through the use of force." He passionately hates the Indian government, which he refers to as a bunch of "beasts". "The occupation of Kashmir by India is naked aggression," he maintains, "and our struggle is against that aggression."

This kind of justification has resulted in the JKLF's transformation into one of the world's most vicious terrorist organisations. Khan's followers have been trained in guerrilla warfare, armed with modern assault rifles and imbued with a philosophy of intense hatred against everything Indian. In POK, the JKLF has opened training camps, which are visited by young Kashmiris from the Srinagar valley. The Pakistani government has conveniently turned a blind eye to the JKLF's operations and Amanullah Khan himself strenuously denies that he is receiving help from the Pakistanis.

Pakistani foreign minister Sahibza-

POK president Sardar Abdul Qayyum, who belongs to the Muslim Conference, let the cat out of the bag by publicly appealing to Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to close down the JKLF training camps in POK. This statement was directed against both Benazir and the JKLF. Qayyum dislikes the JKLF because it is, for the first time, rapidly gaining adherents in POK and since it is obviously a force to contend with in Indian Kashmir. Should India be forced to abandon Kashmir, the JKLF could emerge as the dominant force and eclipse the Muslim Conference.

Similarly, Benazir is hoping that her Peoples' Party will strike roots in Kashmir and has been championing the Kashmiri cause. Qayyum hit out at her by claiming that her encourage-



Inside Pakistan Occupied Kashmir: providing shelter to subversives

da Yaqub Khan, during his meeting with Indian external affairs minister I.K. Gujral in New York last month, pretended not to know anything about Amanullah Khan, not even if he is a Pakistani passport holder. Yet, Amanullah Khan has been invited to every conference of Kashmiri leaders in Islamabad and Rawalpindi in recent months. Khan was present at a conference early this year, which was addressed by Pakistani senior federal minister Begum Nusrat Bhutto. The JKLF chairman is, however, not particularly liked by mainstream POK politicians, who are more than a little suspicious of his demand for an independent Kashmir. POK politicians, including the ruling Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, favour Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and treat any other view as pure heresy.

ment of the JKLF had resulted in an exodus from the Srinagar valley and the refugees coming to POK were disappointed on learning that the Pakistani government is not prepared to do anything more than offer lip-service to the Kashmiri cause. His outburst has embarrassed the Pakistani government.

As for Amanullah Khan, he has embarked on a journey from where there can be no return. He has emerged as one of the world's best known terrorist leaders. If he is to survive, he can never go back to playing the quiet school teacher or the ardent pamphleteer. He has to live by the sword, no matter how embarrassing it is for any government, or tragic for the innocents of the Srinagar valley. •

Indrani Banerjee



# Femme fatale

*Punjab terrorists use women as decoys to trap victims*

**T**errorist activities in Punjab have so far remained the exclusive preserve of men. Even if a section of the fairer sex did have sympathies for the Khalistani cause, they have largely remained in the background of the Punjab struggle. But things are now changing with the rise of a new breed of women decoys, who are helping out their male counterparts to eliminate enemies and destroy targets. And in many cases, they are proving to be more effective.

Take, for instance, the case of Jasmit Kaur, the 24-year-old daughter of a police inspector from Amritsar. Jasmit was working with a private firm in Amritsar when she was picked up by members of the dreaded Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTFK) to carry out a mission. The BTFK had earlier tried its level best to murder Hardev Singh, a CPI(M) worker, but each time the plucky communist managed to escape—he even survived a rocket attack on his house. Satnam Singh Chhina, the BTFK supremo, then hit upon a ploy to corner Hardev Singh. His trump card: the petite Jasmit Kaur, who would play the *femme fatale* and lure the victim into the terrorists' hands.

Everything went according to plans. Hardev was found murdered on 19 March at his native place—Harshashina in Majitha. But as luck would have it, Jasmit Kaur was nabbed by the police while the real culprits escaped scot-free. Today, Jasmit Kaur is languishing in the over-crowded women's barracks of Amritsar jail. "I have ruined my life," she said between sobs. "I know what I did was wrong but I needed the money they offered me for the job," Jasmit admitted.

Jasmit Kaur then went on to relate her story—of how she first came to know the terrorists and how she

was trained to carry out the bloody mission. Like many other young Sikhs, Operation Bluestar was a turning point in her life. Recalled Jasmit: "I was studying at the Khalsa College in Amritsar. The revolution of Bhindranwale was on and I came in contact with members of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF). I was deeply moved by the attack on the Golden Temple by the armed forces."

Among the people Jasmit knew in college was Upkar Kaur, a front-ranking leader of the women's wing of the AISSF. Upkar was also the sister of Malkiat Singh Ajnala, Sant Bhindranwale's trusted lieutenant. Upkar was killed during Operation Bluestar and the incident left a deep scar on the psyche of Jasmit Kaur.

In 1987, when terrorist activities in Punjab had peaked, Ajnala's family approached Jasmit's father with a marriage proposal. The police inspector turned it down on the grounds that her daughter should have nothing to do with a terrorist. Apparently, Malkiat Singh Ajnala never forgot the insult.

Fate decreed that Jasmit meet Ajnala a year later. She had fled from her house and had sought shelter inside the Golden Temple, which was by then a den of the terrorists once again. Jasmit recalled: "I was very depressed. Ajnala's men spotted me and dragged me to him. Ajnala threatened to kill me because I had refused to marry him. In fact, he would have murdered me hadn't it been for a



**Jasmit Kaur in police custody: the 24-year-old daughter of a police inspector was used by the terrorists to carry out their bloody mission**

man called Ranjit Singh, who rescued me."

The incident and the behaviour of the terrorists hurt young Jasmit Kaur's sentiments, but she promised to repay Ranjit Singh's gesture. Gradually Jasmit became disillusioned with the Punjab movement, severed all links with the AISSF and joined a dress designing course.

But as luck would have it, Jasmit Kaur met Ranjit Singh in February this year. She was on her way to office—Jasmit was working as a secretary with the local Rehamat Finance Company—when Ranjit stopped her. Said Jasmit: "Ranjit reminded me of the promise I had made.





NITIN RAI

He also offered me a reward of Rs 1 lakh if I completed the work."

Though the big bucks were tempting, Jasmit initially refused to do the bloody job. But she gave in after Ranjit threatened to kill her family members. Jasmit even got an advance of Rs 3,100 from Ranjit.

For the next two weeks, the BTFK men trained Jasmit Kaur and briefed her about the mission. She took lessons in driving, was made to wear jeans and shirt and was taught to speak Hindi. The crash course over, Jasmit Singh was introduced to Satnam Singh Chinna, who explained the intricacies of the operation.

**O**n 16 March, Jasmit Kaur began the action. She already knew where Hardev Singh was hiding. She drove straight to Harshashina in her moped, where she spotted Hardev in

the fields. Posing as a press reporter from Delhi, Jasmit jammed the two-wheeler and looked helplessly around. Soon, the young Hardev came to her help. She told him that she was covering the border areas of the state for a

**Things are now changing with the rise of a new breed of women decoys, who are helping their male counterparts eliminate enemies and destroy targets**

newspaper in Delhi. Jasmit even asked Hardev to help her out with the assignment. The boy readily agreed and they chalked out a plan for the next day.

For the next few days, everything went according to plans. Jasmit Kaur played her part so well that not even once did Hardev Singh suspect her. Singh and Kaur toured the border villages of Amritsar extensively in an ambassador car, occasionally halting for meals. But there was a hitch: since Hardev was on the hit list of the terrorists, two armed bodyguards always shadowed him. Thus, even while Jasmit and Hardev were travelling, the two guards followed them closely. And all the while, Ranjit Singh kept a watch on the activities of the duo.

Jasmit's task now was to persuade Hardev to leave his gunmen behind on her next reporting assignment to the border villages of Jammu and Kashmir. Hardev readily agreed, and one day, he slipped out of his village with Jasmit.

As their car was approaching Bhandari bridge, a group of BTFK men staged a bid to kidnap the girl. An ever helpful Hardev promptly came to her rescue but he was overpowered by the terrorists. The two of them were pushed into a car, which headed for an unknown destination. On the way, Jasmit was let off by the gang.

The police version of the killing differs from that of Jasmit Kaur. According to her, "the BTFK men had promised to release Hardev after questioning. But I knew that they had lied after I read about the killing from the next day's newspapers. Police officials, however, claim that Hardev was tortured and beheaded in Jasmit's presence. Two days after the murder, Jasmit Kaur returned to work in Amritsar, waiting patiently for Ranjit Singh to turn up with the rest of the money. But before that, the cops picked her up.

Even in police custody, Jasmit Kaur put up a brave front. She steadfastly denied that she had anything to do with the killing of Hardev. But hours of interrogation finally yielded results: Jasmit confessed and told the police about Chhina and his gang. But by then, the BTFK leader had fled.

Surprisingly, Jasmit's family members have not come forward to bail her out of jail. The terrorist gangs, too, are keeping a safe distance. Jasmit Kaur has to face the difficult times ahead alone. •

*Ritu Sarkin/Amritsar*



# "I do what I am told"

*Maharashtra chief minister Sharad Pawar on his relations with Rajiv Gandhi and more*



When Sharad Pawar was sworn in as chief minister of Maharashtra for a second time early this year, many felt that the Congress(I) government he headed would find the going difficult because a hostile National Front was in power at the Centre. They were proved wrong: Pawar has had no major problems with Prime Minister V.P. Singh so far. Political observers attribute this to the fact that the chief minister, who was part of the Opposition in the not too distant past, is on first name terms with most of the central ministers. Maybe, but there is no denying that Pawar is a great survivor who believes in keeping everyone happy. Excerpts from an interview with the Maharashtra chief minister:

**SUNDAY:** In your second term as chief minister you have the National Front government in power at the Centre. Do you find it difficult working with the new set-up? Is there a difference?

**Sharad Pawar:** Yes, there is a difference. When my party chief was heading the central government it was easy to discuss about the problems of the state. Now the relations are more like the Centre and the state. They discuss issues with me. But there is no homogeneity. Their political thinking is different

**Q:** Does it mean you have been having problems with the V.P. Singh government?

**A:** In the beginning there were some problems. For instance, they had written me three letters and on all three occasions I came to know of them first through the media. When I had to write to them, I said that I was aware of their new approach and their idea of an open government and that though I personally did not believe that correspondence between the state and the Centre should be released to the media first, I was doing it in deference to the National Front government's policy of openness. This letter was about the waiving of loans and how the government's stand on this issue was affecting the state. After this there were no problems. I got letters directly.

**Q:** Have there been any policy issues about which you have differed with them?

**A:** There was this important issue of the appointment of Governor C. Subramaniam. I was not even informed about it, leave alone being consulted. Rajiv Gandhi at least used to communicate the name of the Governor to

GOUTAM PATIL



Opposition chief ministers. However, I did not make an issue of it because I have the highest regard for Subramaniam. He is a man of vision, integrity and is a capable administrator.

**Q: So you didn't complain?**

**A:** No. But there is the more important question of the waiving of loans. The National Front government has gone back on its assurance of waiving all debts upto Rs 10,000. This was mentioned in the Front's programme and manifesto; it was also mentioned in the President's speech. But now they are saying that only loans of that amount taken from nationalised banks will be written off. This is unfair because in Maharashtra, only 20 per cent

correct because all lending institutions, whether the banking or cooperative sector, come under the RBI guidelines. Now the Centre is trying to differentiate between the two. The state's financial system is on the verge of collapse unless something is done immediately.

**Q: Have you brought this to their notice?**

**A:** Yes. I read in the press that they are calling a meeting of chief ministers to discuss this issue. But no date has been communicated to me yet.

**Q: So where does this leave the farmer?**

**A:** I have asked them to repay their loans in 12 instalments and have

are going to continue this scheme or not. If there is no assurance or guarantee from the government about the funding, we will have further problems on our hands because the staff for implementing this programme has already been recruited. In that case, they will be redundant.

**Q: How are your relations with Rajiv Gandhi? It is said that you are not expanding your Cabinet because he wants to include some names that are not acceptable to you.**

**A:** That is not true. We had discussed this issue the last time and resolved it. Basically there are two reasons for not expanding the Cabinet. This session of the Assembly which has just con-



**V.P. Singh being greeted by supporters after his election victory**

of the loans are taken from nationalised banks and 80 per cent from the cooperatives. So they are passing the buck on to us and their position is not even legal. Last year, in order to help the farmers I had reduced the interest burden from 10 per cent to four per cent, with the state paying the remaining six per cent. Yet the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) opposed this, saying that it was the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) which was the deciding authority for both banking and cooperative institutions and the state government could not take such decisions. They were legally

opened their line of credit despite their being defaulters. If this is not done they would be caught in a vicious circle. If they cannot get credit, they cannot purchase seeds, fertilisers etc, which in turn, would prevent sowing operations. And, obviously they won't get loans until they repay old ones. I wanted the farmer out of this trap without disrupting the banking system. Of course, the National Front government went about wiping all loans upto Rs 10,000. But now it looks like they are passing the buck on to me.

**Q: Is this the only nagging problem?**

**A:** No. We also do not know the future of some central schemes like the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, whether they

cluded was too short to judge the performance of the new MLAs. I would like to know the reaction of the people in their own districts before appointing them as ministers.

**Q: But meanwhile, the administration suffers because your junior ministers are loaded with eight to 10 portfolios each. Some of them have not yet visited the departments that are under their supervision.**

**A:** They will learn. And they will also know that it is not easy to be a minister.

**Q: But it is telling on the administrative efficiency...**

**A:** Not at all. We have taken several good decisions, but not every decision is made known to the media. For inst-



ance, the decisions to develop horticulture, fisheries, sugar.

**Q: Was your fasting programme at the Kranti Maidan on 10 May a gimmick?**

**A:** No (smiles). It was part of my party's nation-wide programme to focus on communal harmony and integrity of the country, the problems in Jammu and Kashmir, the crisis in Punjab and Assam and also the price hike.

**Q: How do you see the future of the Congress party?**

**A:** It is bright. It has a network throughout the country. We lost as a result of the Opposition parties creating communal feelings about Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid. It had affected the overall election result. But it will not last long and the country will shed this communal



**A VHP procession: whipping up communal passions?**

thinking. There is no alternative to the Congress. The allegations they made against Rajiv Gandhi also seem unfounded. The media kept saying throughout the last two years that they had the names of the recipients of the Bofors kickbacks and would be producing them. Nothing has happened till today. Ultimately the people will understand the truth.

**Q: You mean to say that Rajiv Gandhi is innocent?**

**A:** I have not gone into the details. I am only saying that what the Opposition parties and the media had been talking about have ended in nothing. What is preventing them from disclosing the names if they have them?

**Q: After the elections it was thought that you would play a bigger role in national affairs. But you haven't.**

**Why?**

**A:** Basically I am concentrating on the state. I do what I am told. Let me improve my own house first.

**Q: Issues like communal harmony and national integration are secondary when people are bothered with problems like employment, housing and daily needs. The Shiv Sena has an excellent relationship with people in rural areas.**

**A:** I agree we have to improve our public contract. In fact, we will have problems if we don't do this. But I think that the Shiv Sena's public relations is better than their actual work.

**Q: How did you overcome all these scandals of dereservation—granting land to judges, bureaucrats, MLAs...**

**A:** Land to judges was given before I came on the scene. We were liberal in

giving places to legislators. But if anyone forms cooperative societies and there is land, we give them. Only recently we gave land to textile workers who formed cooperative housing societies.

**Q: If slum dwellers form cooperatives, will you give them land?**

**A:** Yes. As I have said if there is land. But everyone wants land in the island city where there is none.

**Q: Are you serious about having a minister for Bombay?**

**A:** The problems in the Bombay Metropolitan Regional Development Area (BMRDA) are so serious that they are beyond anyone's control. Water and housing are the major constraints. To provide water to Borivli alone will cost Rs 300 crores and in Vasai it will cost Rs 260 crores. There is so much urbanisation taking place that there is an onslaught on villages in these areas. We will have to take the help of townplanners, architects and everyone who wants to protect this city. We will, therefore, have to have a person of administrative capability. I am thinking about it and have discussed it with my colleagues. There is also this continuous influx into the city.

For this reason I am trying to increase the employment in rural areas. For instance, there is so much modern technology available for improving the sugar recovery from cane. But first the harvesting system has to change so that cane is brought freely to the factory. Then the use of molasses. It is a Rs 300 crore industry and if it is properly developed it could give a lot of employment. So also milk production which has resulted in nearly Rs 400 crores being transferred to rural areas. We are sending one lakh litres to Delhi, 80,000 litres to Calcutta and large quantities to Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The small and marginal farmers benefit essentially from these and horticulture and fisheries that I spoke to you about earlier. However, you will hear more about these schemes in the budget.

**Q: Your party is losing out in all elected posts in Bombay. Do you think you will be able to retrieve your party's image before the coming municipal elections?**

**A:** Yes. Our party is on a membership drive currently and will soon have elections. Once we get people who are accepted by the masses then the party will improve. ●

**Interviewed by Olga Tella/Bombay**





# DEVIL'S WIND

**"A**nthaa poyindi... Kottuku poyindi" (Everything is finished, swept away) They were too exhausted to say anything more. The 500-odd refugees huddled at the Hindu College in Machilipatnam had trekked miles from their villages to escape the murderous cyclone that had devastated their coastal villages on the 8th and 9th of May. They had barely made it. Many others had not.

The cyclone that hit seven districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh left over 400 persons dead. The state government estimated that property worth over Rs 1,000 crores had been destroyed. About 10,000 heads of cattle perished and tonnes of harvested paddy were ruined by flood waters. Trees uprooted by hurricane winds snapped power and communication cables. In many places, drinking water was not available and villagers had to wade

## *Andhra Pradesh is hit by a killer cyclone*

through several feet of sea water to get to safety.

Several towns in the area, including Machilipatnam, Guntur, Vijayawada and Tenali were also hit. Suresh, a *beedi* shop-owner in Machilipatnam recalled the night of 9 May, when tidal water surged into the town, carrying away cattle and bringing down several houses: "I don't want to experience another cyclone in my life...it was simply frightening." Other towns suffered as much.

Vijayawada looked as if it had suffered a blitzkrieg. Power lines snapped and the city had to go without electricity till 13 May. The municipal corporation could not provide drink-

ing water, and prices of milk and fuel sky-rocketed. The giant wheel at the fair ground in the centre of town collapsed. A number of public buildings suffered extensive damage. The city's deputy mayor, Barma Seetharamayya, said, "We will ask the state government to sanction Rs 1.5 crores to repair our buildings, roads and installations."

Rail links snapped when flood waters caused a breach in a section of the tracks between Hamasavaran and Machilipatnam. The Samalkot-Vishakhapatnam route too was blocked by swirling flood water, which submerged a bridge near Tuni. Empty goods rakes stranded in small wayside stations were put to good use by local villagers, who decided to take shelter in them. Just how strong the cyclonic winds were can be gauged from the way a couple of goods rakes were blown off the track and deposited in the neighbouring paddy field.





**B**y the time the cyclone actually hit Andhra Pradesh, thousands of people had been removed to relief camps. The arrangements, for once, were impeccable

In many areas, vast stretches of paddy fields turned into saline lakes. Hundreds of acres of rich orchards too were destroyed. "Our entire mango crop worth crores of rupees has been destroyed," lamented T.V. Krishna Rao, a mango orchard owner from Vijayawada. Clearly it will take weeks for these areas of Andhra Pradesh to return to normal.

**B**ut it could have been worse. Fortunately, the weathermen discovered that a storm was brewing as many as five days before it actually hit the Andhra coast. When the cyclone was first picked up by the radars on the night of 4 May, it was just a 'depression', but by the afternoon of the next day, it had developed into a 'severe cyclonic storm' with a core of hurricane winds.

Weathermen tracking the cyclone found that it was moving towards the coast at a terrific velocity and could move overland anywhere between northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh. The initial fear was that it would hit Madras.

On 7 and 8 May, the cyclone stalked the east coast along a zig-zag path. On the morning of 8 May, Madras was out of danger and the cyclone began moving northwards. Madras was fortunate in two ways. For weeks, the city had been reeling under massive drinking water shortage, and the cyclone which passed by brought in its wake a lot of much-needed rain. A few people died due to electrocution and house collapse, but the city escaped major damage. By that time, it was clear that the cyclone was proceeding to Andhra

## How the cyclone developed

*According to meteorologists, it was something of a freak*

**C**yclones are endemic to Andhra Pradesh. But not during the month of May. The cyclone of 9 May was something of a freak. With an estimated wind speed of over 127 knots (234 km/hr) and surge (wind-driven wall of water that rises from the sea) of 5 metres, this cyclone was one of the strongest in recent history. The damage done this time, however, was much less than in 1977, when a cyclone of similar intensity had taken a toll of 10,000 lives in Andhra Pradesh. This was chiefly because the meteorological department had issued warnings about the cyclone well in advance and the state government had been able to evacuate the people living along the coastline.

A two-stage warning system has been worked out by the meteorological department. The first stage is a cyclone 'alert',

which is given 48 hours in advance of a cyclone striking a particular coast. In the second stage, a cyclone 'warning' is issued, with the first bulletin handed out 24 hours before the cyclone is expected to

**Inset IB picture of the cyclone: timely warning**





Pradesh. Alarm signals began flashing and the Andhra state government was told to inform the coastal population. The cyclone was going to be a killer.

The weathermen thought that the cyclone would hit Divi Seema, where, in 1977, a similar cyclone had left almost 10,000 people dead. But the state government headed by Congress(I) chief minister Chenna Reddy took no chances. It ordered the evacuation of over two lakh villagers from all vulnerable areas and established temporary relief camps where they could be accommodated. "There is no problem about money," the chief minister magnanimously declared, after holding discussions with his Cabinet and Opposition leaders at the state capital, Hyderabad.

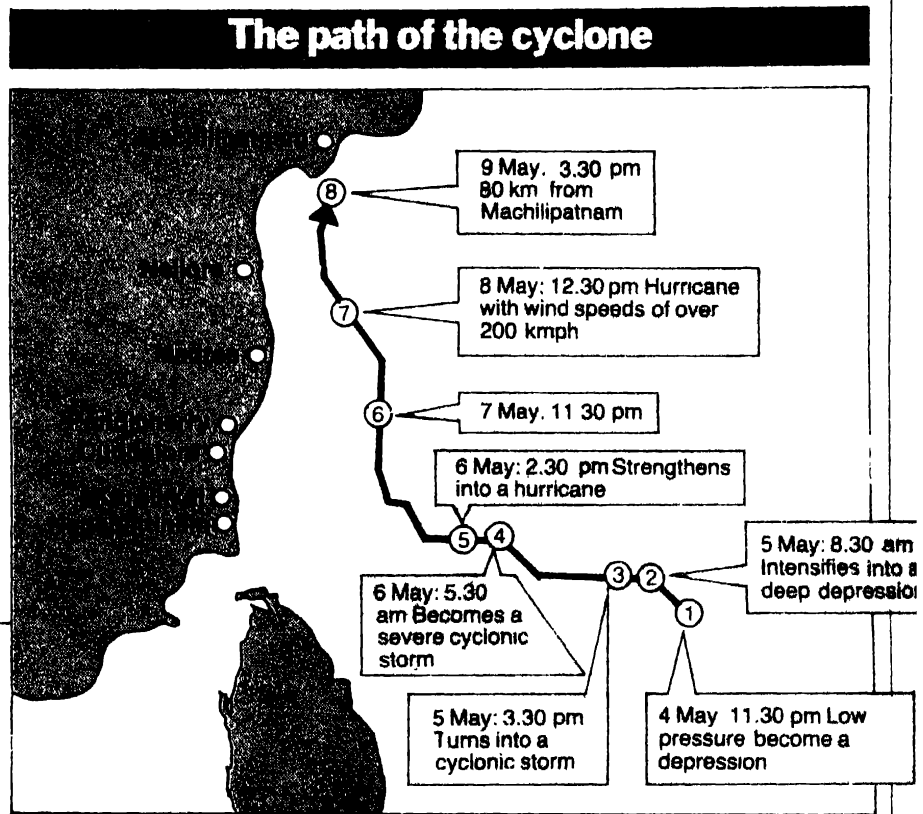
"The intensity of the cyclone was greater than that of 1977," Chenna

strike. Due to this warning system, the loss of lives has been much less than in previous years.

Weathermen today can detect a cyclone even before they are fully formed by analysing Insat 1B photographs and radar images of atmospheric conditions. This time, radar images first indicated the presence of a low pressure area over south-east Bay of Bengal and adjoining south-west Bay on 4 May. By the evening of the next day, the 'depression' had developed into a full-fledged, raging cyclone.

A 'matured cyclonic system' consists of three distinct parts. At the centre is the so-called 'eye', which is a circular area with a radius of 15-25 km, characterised by relatively calm winds and clear skies. The eye is surrounded by a wall of thick clouds, 10-15 km high and 30-50 km wide. This is the area of torrential rains and high wind speeds in the order of 200-250 km per hour. Beyond this, is the outer edge of the cyclone that could be anything from 75 to 500 km wide. Here, wind speeds are far lower.

This cyclone was special. It had two 'eyes' and weathermen, on discovering it from radar pictures on 7 May, predicted that it would be particularly devastating. The good thing about this cyclone was that it moved relatively slowly and could



be tracked throughout. Normally, a cyclone moves at the rate of 300-500 km a day, but this one crept forward at just 1,000 km in four days and gave the Andhra government plenty of time to react.

But this cyclone contained enormous destructive energy and could have wrought much more damage had the Andhra government not acted promptly. Meteorologists explain that a cyclone gathers energy while it is over the sea. As atmospheric moisture gathered by the cyclonic winds condense, the latent energy given off fuels the cyclone. Once over land, the cyclone cannot pick up as much moisture and its energy bleeds off. The 9 May cyclone gathered momentum for at least five days over the Bay of Bengal and travelled over the sea along the east coast. By the time, it hit Andhra Pradesh, the cyclone was swirling in murderous rage. The death of 400 people was a tragedy, but had the state government not reacted fast, it could have been a catastrophe.

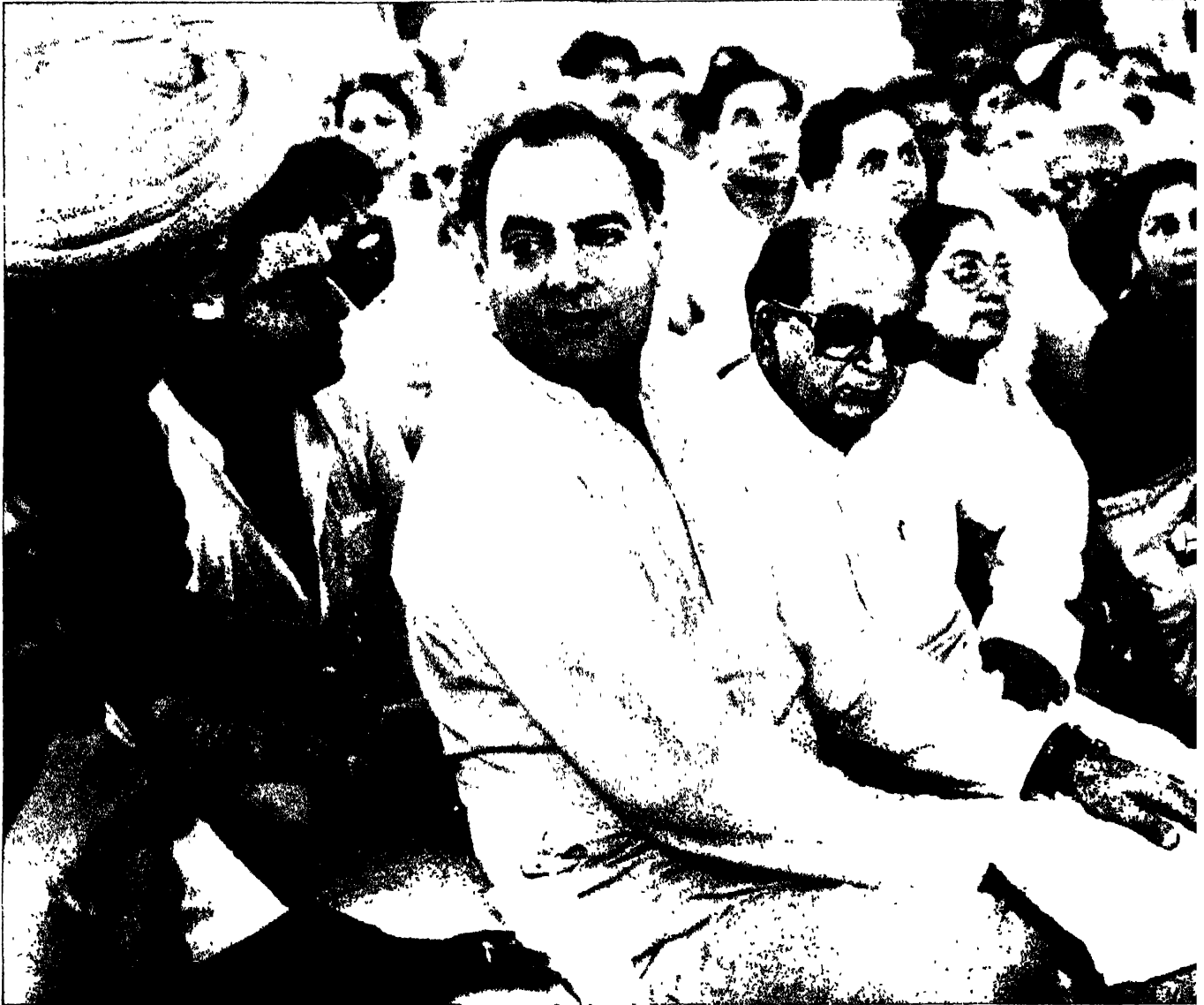
**Bhagwan Singh with Anjali Sawhney**

Reddy pointed out. But the precautions taken by the state government ensured that casualties were kept to a minimum. From 7 May, the state administration began working overtime to evacuate people. By the time the cyclone actually hit the Andhra coast near Machilipatnam, over 40,000 persons had been evacuated and housed in 86 makeshift relief camps in the four coastal districts of Nellore, Prakasam, Guntur and Krishna. C. Arjun Rao, the state commissioner for relief and rehabilitation, added that the chief minister had set up a sub-committee to supervise relief operations at the district level. A number of senior IAS officers were despatched on 'special duty' to the coastal areas, with orders to save as many lives as possible. The army too was roped in and hundreds of trucks, tractors and launches were requisitioned for the mammoth task of shifting thousands of people.

The arrangements, for once, were impeccable. Only 400 people were killed. But for the survivors, the prospect of returning to their devastated homes cannot but be grim. And it's going to be a long time before the last destructive traces of the vicious cyclone disappear. •

**Bhagwan Singh/Andhra Pradesh**





# Fast and faster

*Rajiv Gandhi emulates his namesake to get his comeback moving*

**I**s the slumbering giant waking up at last? With 193 seats in the Lok Sabha and a solid base south of the Vindhyas, the Congress(I) is the single most powerful party in India today. Yet, over the last six months it seems to have collapsed into a stupor, failing to perform as an effective Opposition or to win back the support it lost between 1984 and 1989.

In part, the lack of activity has been prompted by party president Rajiv

Gandhi's unwillingness to make waves. After adopting several macho, aggressive postures during the last session of Parliament, the leader of the Opposition suddenly decided that the time had come for some deep introspection.

Consequently, Gandhi has spent many of the last few months trying to analyse the 1989 defeat and put his own house in order. He has been successful in the sense that, contrary to general expectation, the Congress-

s(I) did not break up and nor did its key members defect to the Janata Dal.

Last week, those successes gave Rajiv the confidence to quicken the pace of his comeback. Borrowing a leaf from the Mahatma's primer, he decided on a symbolic 12-hour fast to protest the deteriorating law and order situation and the 'non-performance' of the V P Singh regime.

While the choice of gesture was unusual for a man who is widely





**Gandhi took to the fast like an eager *satyagrahi*. And for Congress workers, it was a rare opportunity to get close to their leader**

BY NITIN RAI

ceived as the failings of the government

By the end of the day, as photographers clicked away wildly, he was so pleased with the response—which he termed “overwhelming”—that he had the confidence to even bring up the CBI enquiries and FIRs that V P. Singh hoped would dog his comeback.

“It has been six months and the government is doing nothing,” Rajiv told SUNDAY. “The situation gets worse and worse every day. They are totally unable to handle Punjab, Kashmir or Assam. And now there’s a problem in Tamil Nadu also. They are not able to do anything about the rise in the price level. All they are able to do is lodge endless FIRs and institute innumerable enquiries by the CBI.”

**R**ajiv’s confidence was infectious. Said P. Shiv Shankar, former Union minister, “It is not that important that we were on a fast. What was more important was that thousands of volunteers joined in and did not have anything throughout the day. This shows the unity and the enthusiasm of the Congress party.”

Others shared Shiv Shankar’s upbeat mood. Declared another former Union minister, Harekrishna Shastri, “Today we have had nothing. Not even the *paan masala* that we are used to.” Many other leading MPs seized the opportunity to get themselves photographed with their leader and while there was something faintly offensive about the rush to be seen with Rajiv, it did at least drive another point home: all power in the Congress(I) still revolves around Rajiv Gandhi.

For Rajiv, the vote of confidence could not have come at a better time. The previous day’s newspapers had been full of stories about the resignation of Uma Shankar Dixit from the Congress Working Committee. Dixit’s reasons for quitting were fairly standard. Rajiv did not listen enough to the voice of experience, the party’s

leadership was dominated by upstarts, etc., etc. He even told reporters that he thought that Rajiv was a “political zero”, then hastily denied the remark once it appeared in print.

Dixit’s resignation could have suggested discontentment in the ranks, but Rajiv had countered its impact by winning a significant victory against the formerly recalcitrant Karnataka chief minister Veerendra Patil over the composition of his Cabinet.

And now, with the faithful shoving and pushing for his *darshan*, the former Prime Minister looked very much like a man who was in charge.

**T**he Congress(I) now has to decide on the kind of strategy it wishes to adopt. Over the last month, Rajiv Gandhi sat down with the AICC general secretaries and worked out a tentative plan of action. That included the fast on national unity. According to that plan, the fast would be followed by rallies on inflation, atrocities against women and Harijans, communalism and terrorism.

While nobody can quibble with the details of the plan, it still leaves a major question unanswered: what kind of Opposition leader should Rajiv Gandhi be?

He has two real options:

- To follow the example of his late brother and take to the streets. This could entail courting arrest, leading demonstrations, encouraging street-fighters and adopting an aggressive approach. Sanjay’s attitude to all of the Janata government’s enquiries was that they were meaningless. Accordingly, he refused to cooperate and his supporters disrupted commissions of enquiry.

- To return to the persona of 1985-86 and project himself as an alternative to the entire system. He could go on about the deteriorating law and order situation, etc., but his approach would be to rise *above* petty politics and to present himself as an island of sanity, while around him, politicians squabble and fight.

Experience suggests that Rajiv is not Sanjay and that the first approach will fail. But this is by no means clear to the Congress(I). Every MP has his own view on what should be done and so far, Rajiv is listening to them all patiently.

It will only be after he makes up his mind that the slumbering giant that is the Congress(I) will seem fully awake.

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**

perceived as being too western for the symbols and stratagems of old-fashioned Indian politics. Gandhi took to the fast like an eager *satyagrahi*.

He was joined by the party’s office-bearers and by 10,000 volunteers, who squatted on the ground, refusing food and water for the full 12-hour stretch. For Congress workers, it was a rare opportunity to get such privileged access to the party president and Gandhi spent most of the day acknowledging the greetings of the faithful and blushing delicately when elderly female workers bent over to kiss him on the forehead.

Despite the oppressive Delhi heat which drenched his *khadi kurta* with sweat, Gandhi showed no signs of fatigue or even dehydration as he chatted easily with fellow Congressmen and held forth on what he per-



# Who runs the valley?

*Now, the militants start fighting each other*

**F**or the Kashmiri, there are two types of curfew. One is imposed by the administration, the other more deadly one, is euphemistically called civil curfew and is imposed by the militant organisations that have held the valley to ransom these past five months. But in a situation where new militant organisations mushroom overnight, whose writ runs in the valley? Who sends out circulars threatening the people to do this or that or else.

It is a scenario where at last count, there were 43 such militant organisations, complete with self-styled area commanders, military attaches, chairmen and party leaders. And, suddenly the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which had been denounced over the last 40 years, as the secessionist organisation that was a permanent thorn in India's side was being termed "secular-socialist", "moderate", and "reasonable". Its bogey-man image was effectively replaced by a new more formidable militant outfit, the Hejib-ul-Mujahideen, (HM). They

were the ones that now went about the valley, practising guerrilla warfare, Afghan style. Their trademark—a piece of rope strategically twined around their fingers, and used to exterminate the enemy by hanging. The Allah Tigers with their disdain for the good life, smashing liquor shops and bars, burning piles of playing cards, ransacking cinema halls, and closing down beauty parlours. Different organisations claiming credit for various acts of terrorist violence, and stories circulating of how Kashmiri youths were being trained in terrorist camps across the border, and being sent sometimes as far afield as Afghanistan to brave real combat situations. Stockpiles found in graveyards, deadly weapons, even Stinger missiles.

At a time when Kashmir's liberation movement is at its peak—it has been slowly gaining momentum over four decades—who is it that calls the shots in the valley? According to intelligence sources, the two reigning militant groups at this juncture, are the JKLF and the HM. The JKLF, founded in 1964, has largely been an indige-

nous movement, which has, over the past 15 years, acquired an international character when some of its key members such as Amanullah Khan left the country to organise support from the outside. Most of the 40-odd groups today (see box) are either pro-JKLF or pro-Jamaat-i-Islami (JEI).

**T**he fundamentalist JEI (founded in 1942) is an integral part of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which envisages a mighty pan-Islamic state, with a long-standing, well-worked out strategy to use the discontentment prevailing in Kashmir to further its



## THE EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS IN THE FRAY

### Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI)

Founded: 1942  
A fundamentalist, pro-Pak secessionist body

Political adviser: S.A.S Gillani

### Pro-JEI organisations

#### Hizb-e-Islami

Founded: 1982  
A pro-Pakistan militant body  
President: Abdul Majid Dar

#### Hizb-e-Mujahideen

Founded: November/December 1989

A pro-Pakistan militant body

Leaders: Mohammed Ahsan Dar,  
Ashraf Dar

#### Muslim Students' Federation

A pro-Pakistan front organisation of students

President: Mushtaq Ahmed Butt

#### Islamic Tehrik-e-Tulba

Founded: November 1982

#### The women's wing of the Islamic Jamaat-e-Tulba



### Allah Tigers

Founded: 15 August 1989  
A pro-Pakistan fundamentalist militant organisation  
Leader: Noor Khan

Students' wing of JEI

Leaders: Abdul Hamid Fayaz,  
Fayaz Ahmed Sheikh

#### Islamic Jamaat-e-Tulba

Founded: September 1977

A pro-Pak militant body, with the Dukhtarane-Millat as the women's wing, under the leadership of Aasiyah Andrabi

Leader: Dr Inayatullah Andrabi





**A bandh called by militants in Srinagar: holding the valley to ransom**

objectives. The HM, though many Jamaatis deny this, is a splinter group of the JEI. While the JKLF has over the years earned the support of a large section of the valley, it is the HM that has gained popularity over the last month. Unlike the JKLF, which is not cadre-based and therefore less structured, the HM is more powerful because it has cadres, and moreover, its political base is in mosques which are situated all over the valley. Also, it enjoys considerable clout in terms of money and arms, because of the tremendous backing it receives from

the JEI in Pakistan and other "sympathetic" Islamic countries. The JKLF's struggle for a national identity is non-religious, and therefore more acceptable internationally—the West, for instance, is not going to have anything to do with Islamic fundamentalism.

The older of the two organisations, the JEI, in keeping with General Zia-ul-Haq's and the ISI's master plan to include Kashmir in the pan-Islamic conglomeration, tactically allowed the JKLF to acquire an international dimension and win public sympathy

But at the grassroots level, they built up support and an arms base, funded by narco-terrorist syndicates. Slowly but steadily, the JKLF movement, which was largely backed by intellectuals such as Amanullah Khan, has turned into an armed insurrection. More and more youths were sent across the border to receive training; consequently, the movement, like all armed insurgencies, moved underground.

At this point, the JKLF, despite its ideological differences with the JEI, was forced to compromise because it became dependent on the Jamaat's support. This probably explains why the JKLF hasn't fulfilled its threat to investigate the killing of Mir Mustafa and take action against the killers; it couldn't do it because it buckled under pressure from the JEI.

Paramilitary sources are of the opinion that both groups have the backing of 2,500-odd trained militants each, with more being readied for combat across the border. While the JKLF has medium arms like Kalashnikovs, the HM relies on heavy arms, or small, deadly weapons, like rocket launchers, 2-inch mortars and light-machine guns. While both groups have no definite group leader at the moment, it has motivated people like Isfaq Majid Wani, the JKLF's think-tank, who consistently tried to arrange a coordinated insurgency. Majid (who was interviewed by SUNDAY in February) was killed in an encounter in April.

While the two main groups launch their attacks separately, they are careful to help each other underground, and are said to even have met re-

**Zia Tiger Force**  
Founded: 1988-1989  
A pro-Pak militant outfit  
Leader: Mohammed Ashraf Dar  
**Islamic Students' League**  
Founded: 16 September, 1986  
A pro-Pak militant body  
President: Shakeel Ahmed Bakshi

### **Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)**

Founded: 1964  
A militant body for independent Kashmir

Leaders: Javed Ahmed Mir alias Naika, Yasin Malik, military commander (believed to be alive despite state reports stating otherwise)

### **Pro-JKLF groups**

**Al-Jehad**  
Founded: 1988-89  
A pro-Pak militant organisation  
Leader: Mustaq Ahmed Zargar alias Latrum

**Kashmir Students' Liberation Front**  
Founded: Sept-Oct 1988  
The largely POK-based students' wing of the JKLF, recently discredited for the



**Haq's body being brought to New Delhi: a victim of the JKLF**

**Khara-Ghani-Haq killings**  
Leader: Mohammad Farooq Malik

**People's League**  
Founded: Sept 1974  
A pro-Pak secessionist militant organisation with a large support base mainly due to the charismatic leadership of Shabir Ahmed Shah



# "This movement is not new"

## Mian Quayoom on the Kashmir problem

Till a month ago, Mian Quayoom, the soft-spoken and mild-mannered lawyer was known in Kashmir only for his fiery courtroom speeches. Today, the president of the Srinagar High Court Bar Association lives underground in Srinagar—the paramilitary forces have raided his house 17 times since 10 April.

Quayoom, however, is no gun-toting youth—he was one of the negotiators for the release of



**Rubaiya released:** Quayoom was the mediator

Rubaiya Sayeed last December.

As chairman of the Tehrik-e-Huriyate Kashmir (Kashmir Resistance Forum), a conglomeration of ten Islamic organisations and Quayoom himself (he does not belong to any organisation), Quayoom speaks for a large section of pro-Jamaat-e-Islami organisations (see box). SUNDAY met the lawyer-activist a month ago after his meeting with Kashmir minister George Fernandes. Excerpts from the interview.

**Sunday:** At what point did you get involved in the movement and how?  
**Mian Quayoom:** In 1987, there was an agitation regarding the durbar move; many youths were arrested then. I was involved as a professional (lawyer) I have been

appearing on behalf of these detainees since.

**Q: What is the *raison d'être* of your organisation? Is it affiliated to the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI)?**

**A:** No, it is not affiliated to the JET. The Tehrike-Huriyate is a political organisation with a common religious base, and its aim is to fight for the people.

**Q: What makes it different from the 40-odd other groups in the current movement?**

**A:** Ours is a common platform for all ten parties (see box on militant groups), plus myself, to ensure that the decisions of the Jamaat are implemented.

**Q: What is the basis of this common platform?**

**A:** Since the common point of all the parties was to achieve for the people of Jammu and Kashmir the right to self-determination, but they were fighting for this cause in their own way, it was necessary to bring the parties together so that they could fight jointly.

**Q: How do you intend to do this?**

**A:** Firstly, this movement for freedom is not new. These organisations had launched a freedom struggle in 1947, and even earlier, in 1942, they had opposed the accord. We all want to achieve our goal, and give the movement the right direction. Our first task is to mobilise international opinion in favour of the movement. We have deputed our representatives to countries round the whole world to tell them what is the reality about Kashmir. We have decided to agitate at international fora like the United Nations, NAM, Commonwealth, SAARC. More important for the movement is to educate the people here to devise a method of self-reliance.

**Q: What does this self-reliance mean**

**A:** They should not depend on the

products of India, or any other country, and should be able to produce everything on their own. The way things are, it seems the movement is going to carry on for a long time.

**Q: What about negotiations, and reintroducing a new political process?**

**A:** We have no desire to enter into any dialogue with India unless it wants to discuss the modalities of self-determination.

**Q: Do you want *azaadi* or are you for merging with Pakistan?**

**A:** It is for the people to decide.

**Q: But most of the organisations in your group seem to be for Pakistan. Do all of you share the same view on that?**

**A:** Yes, most of them are in favour of Pakistan. These parties want all the people, who have been assured the option of the right to self-determination, to get it.

**Q: It is that where you differ from the JKLF? They want *azaadi*, not Pakistan.**

**A:** Even the JKLF is fighting for the right to self-determination. So there is no difference between them and us.

**Q: On the subject of civil liberties,**

**Jagmohan: providing no solution**





do you believe that religious fundamentalist organisations like the Hejib-ul-Mujahideen would safeguard these?

A: The Hejib-ul-Mujahideen is not a part of the Jamaat-e-Islami, though it may be influenced by Jamaat ideology.

Q: Isn't that a fundamentalist ideology?

A: Whatever is real Islam, one has to follow it. But I am first a human being and then a Muslim.

Q: Do you propose an Islamic state? Would people of other faiths be welcome there?

A: The real spirit of Islam is that it is the only religion of God. There is no doubt that Islam preaches tolerance—nowhere does it say that you should kill them (people of other religions). Hindus living in an Islamic set-up would have no fetters on their religious beliefs. Islam says "Unka deen unke liye" (each to his own religion)

Q: Does this mean that there would be no discrimination against Hindus?

A: According to the Koran, non-Muslims are to pay a *jizya*, or a monetary tax ensuring their safety.

Q: Then why are the Kashmiri Pandits fleeing the valley? Why have they been threatened with dire consequences if they chose to stay?

A: This is all to the credit of the Governor. It was Jagmohan who provided them with army vehicles, monetary help and salaries without work, and encouraged them to make their escape. He intended to impose continuous curfew to crush the Kashmiri Muslims, and this was the method he devised in order to save them (Kashmiri Pandits).

Q: What happens now? Is your organisation part of the decision-making process here and will it provide leadership if there is a need?

A: As the Indian press has also noted, unfortunately there is no statesman in India to understand the problems of Kashmir and take a decision irrespective of whether people support or oppose him. Every person at the helm of affairs wants to continue to remain in

power without taking a decision on Kashmir. They are not solving the problem by using armed forces against peaceful citizens.

Q: But the militants are not peaceful citizens. They have killed innocents like Khera, Mushir-ul-Haq and Abdul Ghani...

A: The militants were pushed to killing them by the Governor's decision not to release a single detainee, who needed an operation to save his life.

Q: Would a new Governor in place of Jagmohan alter the situation?

A: It may lessen the miseries of the



people. He (Jagmohan) is on the cadre of the Shiv Sena. He has not been able to control the situation. Maybe someone with a human heart would understand what the people are going through.

Q: Isn't Pakistan instigating you?

A: The Government of India must recognise that this is not a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Every peace-loving citizen of India who has any respect for the voice of the people should join hands to work towards fulfilling our demand.

Q: It's unlikely that India will grant you freedom. What then?

A: India is not in danger of disintegrating so I don't see why it doesn't let go.

cently across the border to discuss a coordinated counter-offensive against the Indian government's recent crackdown. They also help each other with guns and money. Together, they enjoy the mass support of the people—the JKLF through popular appeal, and the HM through threats and fear.

The recent trends in militant activity in the valley have disturbing implications for the future of the subcontinent. Contrary to popular belief that the movement will be crushed or stifled by brute force, it will probably burgeon over the next few years to assume more frightening proportions. The militants are shifting their operations to the rural areas—strategically this is a deadly move. History illustrates that urban guerrilla move-

**Supporters of the militants: not afraid of brute force**

ments are very difficult to sustain—once the fervour dies down it is easy to crush. Also, it is simpler to contain military being more concentrated in its area. If the movement spreads to the rural areas, and gathers more supporters, then it will be extremely difficult for the security forces to control its activities.

Interestingly, the Jamaat in Kashmir has been steadily nurtured by the Congress over the years, to keep in check the JKLF and the National Conference. Informed sources claim that like Bhindranwale in Punjab, the Hejib-ul-Mujahideen is a direct creation of the Congress(I). And for the moment, at least there seems to be no escape from the follies of the past in Kashmir, as in Punjab. •

**Shiraz Sidhva/Srinagar and New Delhi**



# POLITICAL VENDETTA

*Orissa's Janata Dal chief minister Biju Patnaik raids his Congress(I) enemies, but finds it difficult to pin them down*

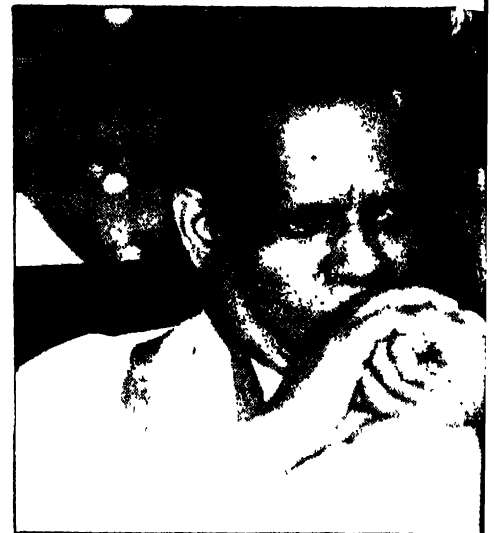
**T**he take-off was the signal for the crack-down. The moment the Indian Airlines Boeing 737 carrying former Orissa chief minister J B Patnaik to New Delhi took off from Bhubaneswar airport on the afternoon of 9 May, officials of the state vigilance department closed in. They caught hold of the former chief minister's son, Prithviballav Patnaik, who had come to see off his father, and told him that he would have to be present while they raided J B Patnaik's house. Patnaik's son had no choice but to comply. His father's departure was the signal for the launch of coordinated raids on 12 Orissa Congress(I) ex-ministers. It was also the beginning of a credibility battle between the ruling Janata Dal chief minister Biju Patnaik and the state Congress(I) leadership.

Biju Patnaik had already declared an open, no-holds-barred war. He has broken the unspoken code about not directing personal attacks on politicians no longer in office. Prime Minister V P Singh might be pursuing the Bofors case with single-minded determination but he has not touched Rajiv Gandhi or his family. The question of raiding Rajiv Gandhi's house is unthinkable. But Orissa's chief minister obviously has different values. And different compulsions.

For the past five years, Biju Patnaik's only theme has been corruption in high places. He has consistently held that J B Patnaik personified corruption. In fact, the Janata Dal leader's campaign during the Assembly elections, which harped on the same issue, had paid rich dividends. The Congress(I) had virtually been wiped out of the state. The popular mandate, it seemed, was against corruption. And from the first day of assuming

office, Biju Patnaik reiterated that he would "spare no one" in his "anti-corruption crusade".

Public pressure too was enormous. Oriyas had suffered for years under a succession of corrupt Congress(I) governments and had finally come to view them as oppressors. Now, having voted an Opposition government to power, they expected action. And fast. They were certainly not prepared to accept any backtracking on this issue. In fact, when Biju Patnaik ordered raids on state government engineers two weeks after coming to power, the first popular reaction was why the engineers? What about the politicians, bureaucrats and contrac-



tors? The issue was threatening to damage the new chief minister's credibility. He had little option but to nail J B Patnaik.

**B**ut could he? He has, for sure, been preparing for it. One of the first things he did after assuming office was to form a special vigilance squad headed by an inspector general of police, R M Patnaik. The Congress(I) reacted to this appointment by starting a whisper campaign claiming that the inspector general of police had links with J B Patnaik and former

## WHAT THE RAIDS REVEALED

*Preliminary reports have it that the vigilance raids on the houses of J B Patnaik and members of his former Cabinet revealed the following assets*

### J.B. Patnaik

A Delhi Development Authority (DDA) flat worth about Rs 3 lakhs, a bank deposit of Rs 2 lakhs, an Ambassador car and a Maruti van.

### Jugal Kishore Patnaik

Bank deposit of Rs 1.87 lakhs, investments, including National Savings Certificate (NSC), worth Rs 1.25 lakhs, gold ornaments valued at Rs 1 lakh, Rs 36,000 in cash, two diesel Ambassadors, two two-wheelers, a double-storeyed house at



**Kanhu Charan Lenka**

BJB Nagar in Bhubaneswar and another house at Bomikhal in Bhubaneswar in his sister-in-law's name

### Kanhu Charan Lenka

Bank deposit of Rs 1.18 lakhs, a savings bank deposit of Rs 95,000, gold ornaments worth Rs 1 lakh, records showing purchase

of land worth Rs 96,000, Rs 18,000 in cash, a single-storeyed house in Bhubaneswar in his wife's name and a house under construction at BJB Nagar

### Harihar Karan

Bank deposit of Rs 2 lakhs, gold ornaments valued at Rs 2.5 lakhs, LIC premiums worth Rs 2.5 lakhs, LIC premiums of Rs 66,000, NSCs Rs 27,000, Rs 45,000 in cash, an NE-118 car, a jeep, costly domestic articles and a three-storeyed house at Nayapalli in Bhubaneswar with marble and mosaic fittings

### Habibulla Khan

Rs 7.68 lakhs in cash, gold worth Rs 4 lakhs, a bank deposit of Rs 60,000, an





**Biju Patnaik (right)** has consistently held that **J.B. Patnaik** personified corruption. Last week, he declared a no-holds-barred war against the former CM

years in power (see box)

The state vigilance department later disclosed that some rooms in J.B. Patnaik's Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and his native village (Rameswar in Puri district) residences could not be searched

Congress(I) minister Niranjan Patnaik. According to Orissa Janata Dal insiders, all this was part of a campaign aimed at discrediting the new vigilance chief R.M. Patnaik, these sources claimed, was an unimpeachable police officer and just the type who would not hesitate to strike against the powerful.

Inspector general of police Patnaik, as it turned out, proved to be equal to the task set him by chief minister Biju Patnaik. He raided a total of 42 premises belonging to J.B. Patnaik and his 11 former Cabinet colleagues and,

in the process, managed to unearth assets worth a total of Rs 2 crores. But that does not solve Biju's problems. The question now being asked in Orissa is whether the raids on the former Congress(I) chief minister and his cronies were effective. Many people in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, are of the view that the raids were something of a 'misadventure'. This view stems from the fact that the raids have not succeeded in unearthing any portion of the fabulous wealth that J.B. Patnaik and company are supposed to have amassed during their

because they were sealed. State government officials claimed that they were still in the process of scrutinising documents seized from the houses of the former chief minister's son-in-law, Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, and former Congress(I) MLA, Suresh Routray. Both of them are supposed to be the *benami* holders of J.B. Patnaik's property.

The haul by the vigilance raiders, in fact, has been most disappointing. Of the 12 former Congress(I) ministers whose premises were raided, vigilance department sleuths found that only one former minister, Habibulla Khan, had imprudently kept more than one lakh rupees in cash in his possession. Even many Orissa Janata Dal leaders are upset over the ham-handed manner in which the raids were conducted. They point out that the former Congress(I) ministers were hardly likely to have kept their accumulated wealth at home, especially after the new state government's constant threats. The vigilance department not only openly advertised the raids but also did not bother to gather sufficient information on where the loot might be hidden.

Having carried out the raids, Biju Patnaik now has to ensure that charges of corruption against J.B. Patnaik stick. It is a question of the Janata Dal chief minister's credibility and future survival. The state government now hopes that it will be able to pin the former Congress(I) ministers down by proving that the houses belonging to some ex-ministers, like Harihar Karan and Nagarjun Pradhan, are worth millions—and much more than what they are officially valued at. But most people in the

Ambassador, a Maruti, a scooter and documents indicating that he had more assets, including a two storeyed house at his home-town, Nowrangpur.

#### **Jadunathdas Mohapatra**

Bank deposit of Rs 1.3 lakhs, an investment of Rs 7 lakhs in making a film, NSCs of Rs 52,000, gold

#### **Jugal Kishore Patnaik**



ornaments worth Rs 47,000, Rs 7,000 in cash, two Marutis, one Ambassador, a Hero Honda motorcycle, US \$500, some German Marks, a house on Aerodrome Road in Bhubaneswar, another house under construction at Nayapalli and a printing press.

#### **Muzafar Husain Khan**

Gold ornaments worth Rs 1 lakh, bank deposit of Rs 25,000, Rs 16,000 in cash, a Contessa car, a two-storeyed house at his native town, Bolangir.

#### **Niranjan Patnaik**

Bank deposit of Rs 1.2 lakhs, gold ornaments worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 20,000 in cash, US \$60, a Fiat and a house at Palaspalli in



#### **Batakrushna Jena**

Bhubaneswar, suspected to be a *benami* asset.

#### **Batakrushna Jena**

Bank deposit of Rs 51,000, a house at Sahidnagar in Bhubaneswar, three plots of land in the names of his wife and children and a house under construction in his village.



# "I welcome this raid"

**Congress(I) leader Niranjan Patnaik is not perturbed**

**SUNDAY:** What do you feel about the vigilance raids on your houses and those of your colleagues in the former J.B. Patnaik Cabinet?

**Niranjan Patnaik:** It is political victimisation. Now that the Biju Patnaik government has failed to fulfil its commitments on controlling prices of essential commodities and various other promises, it has tried to divert the people by this stunt.

well and they will also come to know us in the course of time.

**Q: Do you feel humiliated because of the raids?**

**A:** I shall have to accept all this as the price for my sincere service to the people. The price I have been made to pay is due to the action of Biju Patnaik—the root of all corruption in Orissa. He is now posing as a *sadhu* and trying to find faults



**Having carried out the raids, Biju Patnaik now has to ensure that the charges stick**

**Niranjan Patnaik: "Biju is the root of all corruption"**

**Q: How do you account for the assets seized from your houses?**

**A:** They are already accounted for. Anyone can see my income tax records. Moreover, all that has been claimed to have been found (during the raids) is not mine. Some assets like the house (at Palaspalli, Bhubaneswar) and the car belong to my younger brother, Amiya Ranjan Patnaik, who has been running his own business for the last 12 to 13 years. I myself have been an income tax and wealth tax assessee for the last 25 years.

**Q: How are you and your colleagues going to tackle what you say, the "political" raids at the political level?**

**A:** People know Biju Patnaik very

with others. He is also acting like Dhritrashtra by ignoring the misdeeds of his party colleagues. I welcome this raid, but I would have been happy if someone else, and not Biju Patnaik, had ordered it. What has happened to his income tax case regarding his Kalinga Trust funds? Did he not play a host to Walcot (the international smuggler) in his Bhubaneswar house?

*Niranjan Patnaik later expressed his bitterness about the callous manner in which the raid was conducted in his Bhubaneswar house in his absence. He pointed out that the vigilance personnel behaved in a petty manner and even seized such everyday items as the latrine mug and his wife's knitting needles.*

government are sceptical about the quality of the evidence collected during the raids.

**P**redictably, it is the raiders who are now on the defensive. The Congress(I) ex-ministers who have been raided have demanded that the government should disclose the list of assets unearthed by the vigilance department and should also prove that these assets were acquired through corrupt means. J.B. Patnaik has accused the present chief minister of indulging in "politically motivated" acts. Another former minister, Kanhu Charan Lenka, who was in Bhubaneswar, actually welcomed the raids and said he had stayed behind to "cooperate" with the vigilance department. He, however, demanded that even the assets of Janata Dal ministers, including Biju Patnaik, should be made public.

But just how slender the vigilance department's case is can be judged from what they discovered about J.B. Patnaik: a DDA (Delhi Development Authority) flat worth Rs 3 lakhs, a Rs 2 lakh bank account and two cars—hardly proof of unparalleled corruption. The former chief minister's relative and Cabinet colleague, Niranjan Pat-

naik, whom the Janata Dal leadership had targeted for concentrated attack, too has emerged unscathed. In his case the raiders merely learnt that he has a bank deposit of Rs 1.2 lakhs, gold worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 20,000 in cash, a Fiat car and a house (suspected to belong to him).

All this is hardly sufficient to prove that the Congress(I) ministers had been looting the state for the past ten years and has amassed vast personal fortunes. The kind of stuff the vigilance department sleuths found is measly, even by middle class standards. Senior state government officials, however, remain hopeful that cases will be filed against all the 12 ministers. Now, the state government has to either prove that these assets were illegally acquired or it has to unearth more damning facts. If it does not, the very rationale for the Orissa Janata Dal's election will collapse.

Biju Patnaik has fired the first shot. Now he has to ensure he wins the war. ●

**Sarada P. Nanda/Bhubaneswar**



# Calling the shots

*Don't laugh at Devi Lal. Recent events suggest that he might have the last chuckle*

**D**evi Lal has a secret his clownishness persona is only cosmetic. The joker's face disguises one of the country's shrewdest political manoeuvrers. Those who laughed at his bumbling, bucolic ways are beginning to realise that it was the Tau who has been chuckling all along. And today, for many of the scoffers inside the Janata Dal, it is already too late. The clown looks all set to have the last laugh.

Lal has proved that he is the only other power to contend with in the Janata Dal after Vishwanath Pratap Singh. And all those Janata Dal leaders who thought that V P Singh would be able to sideline the Tau are in a panic. For not merely has the Jat from Haryana survived, but he looks set to prevail, perhaps even dominate the Dal. Devi Lal's remarkable political resilience and ability to turn intra-party equations in his favour have stunned his detractor. Even V P Singh realises that if there is anyone within the Dal who can push him off his prime ministerial perch, it is Devi Lal. Predictably, this realisation has hushed Lal's critics within the V P. Singh camp.

And the Tau is reigning supreme. Just how much his clout has increased can be gauged from the manner in which even his most ludicrous demands are met. Take, for instance, his success in forcing everybody to speak Hindi in Cabinet meetings. Initially, this demand met with strong resistance from several ministers and bureaucrats.

But Lal made an issue of it and V P Singh, ultimately, had to relent. During one Cabinet meeting, Devi Lal even snubbed Cabinet secretary and V P. Singh favourite, Vinod Pande, when he began speaking in English. "Too kyon English jhaar raha hai?" (Why are you shooting your mouth off in English?) interrupted Lal, and a nervous Pande stammered "Sir, mai Bharat ke gaon ke samasya par bol raha tha" (Sir, I was speaking on the problems of India's villages). But the unrelenting Tau shouted back, "Too gaon ke baat kya

karta hai? Kabhi gaon gya hai?" (What can you say about villages? Have you ever been to a village?). A visibly shaken Pande did not care to continue the conversation.

At a Janata Dal Parliamentary Party meeting in the Central Hall of Parliament, when Prime Minister V P Singh delivered a speech in English, a few MPs from UP and Bihar objected and asked him to speak in Hindi in future. Before Singh could reply, Devi Lal stood up and assured the legislators that he at least would speak in Hindi. "There are a few persons

who speak in English. But we are not going to be impressed," Lal declared, much to the embarrassment of V P. Singh and the delight of the assembled MPs, who loudly applauded Lal's remarks.

**D**evi Lal's anti-English stance might point to his arrogant, rural upbringing, but it also shows that the Jat leader knows his constituency. His vote-bank is confined to the rural Hindi heartland. And it is this segment of the population he constantly addresses. He knows that the illiterate peasantry of this region views English with a mixture of hatred and suspicion. His condemnation of English is, therefore, politically motivated. If his recent moves are analysed, it will be obvious that the canny Devi Lal has deliberately kept up his image of being an unsophisticated, almost crude, old peasant, keeping in mind his electorate. Even his official residence at the President's Estate in New Delhi

Devi Lal: walking tall







**Ranjit Singh is now looking for a compromise and might be persuaded to support his brother, Om Prakash Chautala (left)**

sports a bold sign. "Devi Lal ka Ghar" (Devi Lal's House)

But the Tau's perspicacity goes beyond posturing. He knows how to play his political cards as well. When he 'donated' the prime ministership to Vishwanath Pratap Singh and accepted the post of deputy prime minister, many questioned his decision. They pointed out that Lal had been elected leader of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party and could legitimately have staked his claim for the country's top post. In retrospect, accepting the deputy prime ministership was a cunning move. The post ensured that he was officially regarded as Number Two in the government and not someone who could be completely sidetracked like Chandra Shekhar.

The Meham episode proved how Devi Lal could get away with anything. The Janata Dal leadership had been talking about political morality and the blatant rigging at this constituency just could not square with what the party preached. There was a public outcry against Devi Lal's son, Om Prakash Chautala, and most political observers, at one stage, were convinced that Chautala would have to step down. Prime Minister V.P. Singh referred the issue to the Political Affairs Committee of the Janata Dal. But nothing happened. Chautala is still the chief minister of Haryana and all of V.P. Singh's promises about electoral reforms today stand for nothing.

Devi Lal got his way by announcing his resignation from the deputy prime ministership at a time when the pressure on him was the greatest. The sudden, dramatic announcement plunged the National Front government into a

temporary crisis. The cookie looked as if it was about to crumble. The Janata Dal's reaction was predictable. Faced with the prospect of the government collapsing, Dal leaders—without exception—pleaded with Devi Lal to reconsider his decision. And the Tau magnanimously reconsidered. He had won. After this episode, no faction in the Janata Dal would dare annoy him. Not even Vishwanath Pratap Singh.

Devi Lal's next coup was the removal of Ajit Singh, who had been extremely vocal about the Meham rigging, from the secretaryship of the Janata Dal. At the same time, the Tau found his son a safe constituency—Darabakala. If Chautala loses the Meham by-election, he can always

## The men behind the throne

*Who are Devi Lal's advisers?*

**D**eputy prime minister Devi Lal has no less than four trusted advisers. He religiously consults them before taking any significant decision. They are: Chandra Shekhar, Sharad Yadav, Chand Ram and K.K. Deepak.

The Janata Dal leader from Ballia, Chandra Shekhar is the strategist. His pathological hatred for V.P. Singh inspires him to great depths of deviousness. He broods and hatches plans at his Bhondsi farmhouse. Devi Lal, only too willingly, implements what Chandra Shekhar's embittered mind chalks out. Devi Lal's son and Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, too, is a close friend of Chandra Shekhar. In fact, it is said that Chautala often used Chandra Shekhar as a conduit for transmitting his political views.

The Union textiles minister, Sharad Yadav, has a long-standing relationship with Chandra Shekhar. Yadav continues to be a staunch supporter and admirer of Chandra Shekhar and believes that V.P. Singh, the usurper, has unfairly exploited the fruits of their struggle against the Congress(I).

Sharad Yadav, however, does not get along with Chautala. But he does not let this come in the way of his friendship with Devi Lal. Lal, on his part, seems to have great

faith in Yadav's political acumen. For, before every meeting of the Janata Dal Political Affairs Committee, the Tau rushes to Yadav for advice.

Former Union minister Chand Ram from Haryana is a long-time follower of Devi Lal. He is not a politician with a mass base; Ram believes in the politics of convenient alliances and has hung on to Devi Lal with considerable tenacity. Lal, in turn, got him a ticket for the Hardoi Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Ram, apparently, was not certain if the voters in his native state, Haryana, would take to him. At any rate, thanks to the Tau, he won the elections and has now emerged as the deputy prime minister's key liaison man.

**Sharad Yadav**







RAJESH KUMAR

**Their dislike for V.P. Singh binds them together. Chandra Shekhar is Devi Lal's chief strategist**

Ram was the man who mediated in Devi Lal's reconciliatory meetings with Ajit Singh and Ranjit Singh.

Last but not the least is Devi Lal's former PA, K K. Deepak, who was the principal of an intermediate college in Haryana before he joined the Tau's services. Lal is obviously impressed by Deepak's learning; for, he now consults him at every step. Deepak is thus Chanakya to the ambitious Tau. With four such impeccable advisers, how could the deputy prime minister possibly lose?

Chand Ram



contest again. Lal, the ever-anxious parent, has also worked overtime to woo anti-Chautala Jat leaders. Devi Lal's second son, Ranjit Singh, who hates Chautala, has been isolated and many of his supporters have deserted him. Haryana leader Kripa Ram Puniya's group too has split. In fact, so effective has Devi Lal's attack on the anti-Chautala camp been that reports now suggest that Ranjit Singh, too, is looking for a compromise and might be persuaded to support his brother, Chautala, in Darbakala. The family reunion is likely to be consummated by Ranjit Singh's appointment to an important post in Delhi.

**T**he joker in the Janata Dal pack is now preparing to be king. His final target is Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Devi Lal has come to believe that his real enemy is the Raja and in the long run only one of them can survive as the Janata Dal supremo. He is consequently determined to cut down every group and individual supporting V P Singh. And in this final crusade, the Tau has shown a willingness to compromise with anybody, as long as it furthers his ultimate aim.

The rivalry with Ajit Singh, for instance, has conveniently been forgotten

for the moment. Devi Lal has held two rounds of 'secret' talks with Singh in recent weeks. The mediators in these talks were Union minister of state for health Rashid Masood and former minister Chand Ram. Devi Lal has, reportedly, assured Ajit Singh that he would not henceforth interfere in western Uttar Pradesh politics and, in return, Ajit Singh has promised to keep away from Haryana. Both have also agreed to accommodate each other's supporters. Besides, the Tau is trying to sort out differences between Ajit Singh and UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav by telling both that V P Singh wants to keep the backward class Janata Dal leaders divided.

To show that he is serious about mending fences, the deputy prime minister has got a number of plum assignments for Ajit Singh's men. Ajit Singh, on his part, has convinced Devi Lal of the need to scale down his attacks on Arun Nehru and company. Similarly, Devi Lal has made up with Chandra Shekhar and the two leaders today keep each other informed about their moves. And it is these moves that have made the deputy prime minister the real power in the party.

V P Singh found out just how





**The Tau has come to believe that his real enemy is the Raja and, in the long run, only one of them can survive**

powerful his deputy had grown when it came to electing a president for the Janata Dal. The Raja had decided on Jaipal Reddy and it seemed, at first, that he would have his way. But Devi Lal, who was in China at that time, heard of the move and immediately called his cronies in New Delhi to defeat Reddy.

Devi Lal's nominee was S R Bommai. And the moment word got out that the Tau supported Bommai, leaders like Ramakrishna Hegde, Arun Nehru and Ajit Singh indicated that they would not back Reddy. Within 24 hours, the situation had changed dramatically and it was certain that Reddy would lose. A panic-stricken V P Singh requested his friends, the Orissa chief minister Biju Patnaik and finance minister Madhu Dandavate, to somehow postpone the elections. A showdown was thus averted, but even Jaipal Reddy realised it was the Tau and not Vishwanath Pratap Singh who really controlled the party. Janata Dal insiders disclose that now Reddy is imploring Devi Lal to make Bommai step down.

Another prominent casualty in this war has

been the *Indian Express*. Devi Lal believes that the *Express* campaign against him was inspired by V P Singh. According to sources within the Janata Dal, V P Singh had made up his mind to drop all the pending cases against Ramnath Goenka and his newspaper empire. The deputy prime minister, however, decided he would hit out by publicising the *Express* cases. He first wrote a letter to V P Singh, alleging that the *Express* was conspiring with foreign powers to destabilise the country. With the letter, he attached an 80-page document, listing the dozens of charges against Ramnath Goenka and his group. A few days later, the letter and its 80-page annexure was leaked to a few Congress(I) MPs who flourished it in Parliament with great glee. V P

Singh was left with no option but to announce that the government had no plans to drop any of the pending cases.

The *Express* episode had a curious fall-out. Ramnath Goenka is reported to be anything but pleased with his editor Arun Shourie's anti-Devi Lal stance and believes that a compromise ought to be effected with the Tau. Goenka,

apparently, has not taken kindly to Shourie's constant trades against the deputy prime minister or the use of the *Express* as a tool in the proxy battle between the Prime Minister and his deputy. Shourie is by all accounts, in a bit of a fix. Even his hope of being nominated to the Rajya Sabha has been stalled by Devi Lal, who wrote a strong letter to V P Singh opposing Shourie's nomination. On the other hand, Devi Lal has managed to get even his PA (personal assistant), K K Deepak, nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

Everything points to the fact that Devi Lal is no ordinary deputy prime minister. Nor is he a clown. If his behaviour is anything to go by, then he is the real head of the Indian government. Huge boards outside his residence in President's Estate read "Up-Pradhan Mantri Niwas". Armed commandos constantly guard him. Like the Prime Minister, he too has his special Air Force aircraft for his frequent cross-country visits, complete with a captive Doordarshan crew. His regular cavalcade consists of a minimum of eight cars. But those are only the standard trappings of power. His real clout lies behind the seemingly ridiculous visage of the country clod.

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**

**Ajit Singh: an ally of convenience**





# Making out with Japan

*New Delhi could do with a dose of love in Tokyo*



It may be rather late to advert to it, and the subject is surely not half as sexy as, say, Pakistan or China. But the visit to this country by the Japanese Prime

Minister, Toshiki Kaifu, merits greater attention than it has received so far. In fact, to say that this event is something of a landmark, not just in bilateral relations between this country and Japan, but for the whole of Asia, would be no exaggeration.

The 10 per cent increase that Kaifu announced in the yen credit to India raising the figure to 100 billion this year, is the least part of his odyssey through this country, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The more material point is that Japan, with its formidable economic clout which has frightened even the almighty Americans, has at last become aware of, and interested in, South Asia which, in the terminology of the *Gaimushu*, the Japanese foreign office, is called South-West Asia. This wholesome development would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. For, inexplicably, until very recently Japanese vision in Asia extended only up to Burma or over the co-prosperity area envisioned by a previous generation of the Japanese. The Gulf, of course, mattered to Tokyo, especially after the "oil shokku" of 1973. However, the Japanese policy planners managed to shift their gaze from Rangoon to Kuwait and beyond without looking at the vast and populous Indian subcontinent.

No Japanese Prime Minister in the post-war era before Kaifu ever visited any Asian country before first making a pilgrimage to ASEAN countries, collectively a backyard of Japan, economically at least. Kaifu is the first Japanese PM to pick on India and its neighbours for his first visit outside the charmed circle of the rich nations of the West, headed by the US.

Both personal and national purposes appear to have influenced Kaifu's travel plans and, more impor-

tantly, his pronouncements in India as well as in Pakistan on the delicate and sensitive issue of Kashmir. Personally, Kaifu is anxious to improve his standing among his countrymen and thus free himself from the tutelage of Takeshita, the ousted Prime Minister who still wields much greater influence in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party than any other leader. To be seen to be playing a moderating, if not a mediatory, role between India and Pakistan is a very good way of doing so. But it ought to be clear that he would not have been able even to dream of what he has done were it not for the fact that Japan collectively is looking for a new role in the vastly changed world of today.



**Kaifu: stretching out a helping hand**

The basic US-Japan security relationship endures. But the economic clash of interests between the two allies is assuming alarming proportions. Despite Super 301, Japan's trade surplus of \$50 billion with the US is on the increase. Many Americans continue to talk of an "economic Pearl Harbour". Despite the so-called ceiling of one per cent on Japanese military expenditure, Japan, in absolute terms, is the world's third largest spender on defence. It has greater military power than either Britain or France. While its own relations with the US have entered a very uneasy phase, it carefully watches the growing detente between the US and the

USSR and a reasonably cordial dialogue between China and the Soviet Union. After all, Li Peng, his Chinese opposite number, was in Moscow while Kaifu was being feted in New Delhi and Islamabad.

Under these circumstances, what would have been more natural for Japan than to want to play a more active political role, especially in crucial areas of the world, like South Asia, which it had earlier left alone? Kaifu's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, should both sides invite it to do so, is parallel to its sudden interest in promoting an understanding between the Cambodian premier, Hun Sen, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk with a view to ending Cambodia's long-lasting agony. In New Delhi, the visiting Prime Minister was told, of course, that India does not want third party intervention in its relations with Pakistan. He did not seem to mind.

Altogether, therefore, Kaifu has offered this country an excellent opportunity to establish with Japan the kind of relations that must exist between the two countries, but have unfortunately eluded them so far. The great Asian triangle consists of India, Japan and China, not of India, China and Pakistan, as some foolish Indians, blindly following western analysts, have made out.

The unending stream of Marutis, recklessly zig-zagging through Indian traffic and risking countless lives, should not mislead anyone. The India-Japan relationship at present is not good, indeed pathetic. Japan has invested nine billion dollars in Indonesia, just under four billion in Singapore, two billion in China and 1.7 billion in Malaysia. In India the Japanese investment is a measly 70 million dollars.

Japan surely has reservations about Indian investment and economic policies. But these can be sorted out. Our investment can even be ignored. The real issue is establishment of a basic and overarching understanding with Japan. The opportunity now being offered must be grabbed. ●



## COVER STORY

■ Nitish Bharadwaj with other actors: easy camaraderie; (extreme right) Ravi Chopra: exacting standards

*Sundays will never be the same again. TV's Mahabharat draws to a close*



# END OF



■ B.R. Chopra: a god-sent opportunity to re-establish himself

**A**s the sun beat down on the make-believe Kurukshetra at Film City, Bombay, the Krishna of the television's mega-serial, *Mahabharat*, sat in a chariot, furiously dabbing at the sweatbeads on his forehead with a tissue in one hand, and holding—not the *sudarshan chakra*—an umbrella in the other. Director Ravi Chopra, meanwhile, shouted invective into a microphone. “If you guys don’t get it right this time, I’ll kick you all out.” (So much for being christened ‘Aryaputra’ by his colleagues!) Fifty-odd junior artistes in their tacky costumes and tin-pot helmets rushed to do his bidding as they scrambled on to their horses. And the pantheon of small screen gods touched up their greasepaint, strapped on their Velcro-fitted shields, filled their make-believe quivers with arrows, screwed up their faces to put on appropriately fierce expressions and prepared to “get it right” for the nth time. The cameras rolled, the

horses galloped, the chariots rumbled and Chopra shouted “cut” only to have the entire rigmarole begin all over again.

**W**ith the telecast of the 93rd episode in early July, the curtains will finally be drawn on a serial that has hypnotised the entire nation. For the millions who are hooked to the drama unfolding on their 20-inch screens, Sunday mornings will never be the same again. The end of the epic will also leave a big vacuum in the lives of director Ravi Chopra and his army of technicians, actors and behind-the-scenes personnel. For, *Mahabharat* was more than an epic. It was a national addiction.

Such was the nation's obsession with *Mahabharat* that Doordarshan officials were forced to reschedule the programme at 9 am after viewers objected to the initial 10 am, Sunday morning slot. Though the first episode recorded viewership figures of only 33 per cent, these soon soared and hit a





# AN EPIC

plateau at 75 per cent. On a couple of occasions, the figures even touched an all-time high of 95 per cent. Says Sarang Panchal, executive director of the market research agency, MRAS/Burke: "It has had a massive core audience which no other television serial has been able to match till date." Even its epic predecessor, Sagar's *Ramayan*, could only boast of viewership figures of 75 per cent at the top end of the scale. Says Ravi Chopra, "Even in our wildest imaginations, we could never have dreamt of such a tremendous response."

**F**or the Chopras, Ravi and his father who heads the BR movie empire, the project itself came as a god-send. One of the

most prestigious banners in Hindi moviedom, the Chopras' glory days were most definitely over. The blockbuster barons were finding it more and more difficult to live up to their reputation of churning out money-spinners as film after film bombed at the box-office. A chequered career graph, which included hits such as

*Gumraah*, *Waqt* and *Insaaf Ka Tarazu*, had been stymied mid-stride with disasters such as *Hamraaz*, *Aadmi Aur Insaan* and even an Amitabh Bachchan starrer, *Zameer*.

In a last-ditch bid to re-establish themselves, the Chopras launched a major offensive. *The Burning Train*, billed as one of the costliest pro-

ductions of its time, boasted a star-cast that put *Sholay* to shame, and had state-of-the-art special effects thrown in. But it turned out to be a major disaster that very nearly wrecked the BR empire. Fortunately for the Chopras, their next venture proved to be a face-saver but *Nikaah* was at best a moderately successful movie. It was in such a scenario that the then secretary for information and broadcasting,

■ A scene from *Mahabharat*: mythology sells





S.S. Gill, made the Chopras an offer they couldn't refuse: he proposed they make a 52-episode serial (which was later extended) for Doordarshan on the epic, *Mahabharat*.

As it turned out, not only was it a chance for the fast-fading filmmakers to get their act together, but also the perfect opportunity for them to make their millions while commanding

a viewership which few films could boast. Among the post-*Mahabharat* releases by BR Films only *Aaj Ki Awaaz* managed to do reasonably well at the box-office while *Dahleez* and *Awaam* sank without a trace. This only helped reinforce what trade pundits were already predicting: *Mahabharat* would do for the Chopras what *Ramayan* did for Ramanand Sagar.

Though both *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* went on the

**The key to the success of *Mahabharat* was the fact that it did not go against any preconceived notions about the epic**

decision, says Ravi Chopra, worked out in their favour. "We got the time to get the logistics and other routine things organised and a little more time to work on the screenplay."

Eventually, the Sagar saga wound up and its sequel, *Uttar Ramayan*, was slotted for Friday evening prime-time viewing, but it never quite made the grade. The Chopras' *Mahabharat*, in the meantime, took off to a flying start. It fitted into the slot vacated by *Ramayan* like a glove and the masses,

floors at approximately the same time—Gill had offered Sagar the *Ramayan* project—Doordarshan officials felt that beaming two epics simultaneously might prove to be counter-productive. So, the Chopras had to cool their heels while Sagar went on the air first with his *Ramayan* and took his own sweet time to wind up his epic effort.

But the government

GAUTAM PATOLE



« Feroz 'Arjun' Khan: In by a whisker

GAUTAM PATOLE



« Puneet 'Duryodhan' Issar: no namby-pamby roles for him

## STARDOM STAKES

*How Mahabharat catapulted unknowns into fame overnight*

**F**or small-time actor Feroz Khan it was the proverbial make-or-break opportunity. B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharat* was being launched and talent scouting was on in full swing. Khan, with a couple of bit roles in insignificant television serials to his credit, was among the 28,000 aspirants who were being auditioned. The screen test came and went, and Khan was rejected. Soon after, he missed the lead role for R.K. Nayyar's film, *Pati Parmeshwar*, by a whisker. Disappointed, he returned to BR Films' offices in the hope that he could wangle a bit role. At that time, Juhi Chawla was being screen-tested for the role of Draupadi. Gufi Paintal, the production controller, thrust some costumes at Khan and asked him to pose as Arjun. No sooner had B.R. Chopra set eyes on Khan, than he exclaimed: "That's my Arjun."

The rest is, of course, history. But as Khan, who has since rechristened himself Arjun, puts it, "It was the moustache that did the trick. Earlier, too, I had been screen-tested but without the stick-on moustache." While Arjun literally stumbled onto the role, Puneet Issar, who plays Duryodhan, specifically wanted the role of Duryodhan. "As a kid, I had always hero-worshipped Bheem," recalls Issar. "Because I was a weakling, my Dad would always tell me, 'look son, if you drink your milk, you'll grow up big and strong like Bheem.' And I would quietly do his bidding." But when it came to choosing his role in *Mahabharat*, he opted to be Duryodhan. "Until *Mahabharat* came along, I had been doing negative roles, and I thought that this would be the opportunity not only to play a bad guy, but since the character has so

many shades, it would be a challenge to do it well." And Issar had no trouble at all in walking away with the role.

Nor did Pravin Kumar, the Bheem of Chopra's *Mahabharat*. A former Olympian, Kumar had given up hope of being the centre of attraction after his career in sports was over. "I had begun to believe that the chapter of my life which had brought me such recognition and fame was over and done with. I'd been out of the limelight for 15 years and yet I still missed it." Finally with Bheem's role, Kumar returned to the spotlight. And this time, it's not just sport -buffs who recognise his 6' 6" frame, but anyone who watches the most popular show on Indian television.



GAUTAM PATOLE



\* (Clockwise from far left) Mukesh 'Bhisma' Khanna: into the big league; Nitish 'Krishna' Bharadwaj: the race has just begun; Rupa 'Draupadi' Ganguly: one-serial wonder?

Yet another success story was that of Mukesh Khanna, who had despaired of ever making it big in movies. But his portrayal of Bhisma catapulted him overnight, into the big league, and today Khanna has some of the most coveted assignments in the industry.

For ex-veterinarian, Nitish Bharadwaj, whose only major assignment was a role in Nabyendu Ghosh's *Trishagni*, wielding Krishna's *sudarshan chakra* has meant a big leap forward in his career.

Rupa Ganguly, Renuka Israni, Gajendra Chauhan, Pankaj Dheer and countless other aspiring stars who performed in *Mahabharat* have got a head-start in their careers. But whether theirs will be one-serial success stories, only time and the gods can tell.

already hooked to a diet of religious epics, lapped it up. But where *Mahabharat* triumphed over *Ramayan* was in its superior production techniques. Spectacle, splendour and grandeur were the catch-phrases that stood the filmmakers in good stead. Their technical expertise was put to the test right from the day the serial went on the air on 2 October, 1988. Opulence was the key to success and as the serial rode the crest of the popularity wave, the sets got even more lavish and spectacle-oriented.

It was the 'war sequences', however, which conclusively proved the Chopras' superior technical skills. The unit tested Mysore, Bangalore, Madras and Dehradun for a suitable locale for its crucial battle scenes before finally deciding on Jaipur. "Only Jaipur could meet our requirements," explains Chopra. "For the action scenes, we used about 5,000 men, 500 horses and 100-odd elephants. In the process, we spent more than Rs 40

lakhs on just 20 days of shooting." Twenty days and 2,100 shots (which were taken with six cameras) later, the *Mahabharat* unit returned to Bombay and the race against deadlines—post-production work had to be completed while simultaneously shooting for the next episodes. "We had lost 20 days, which meant about four episodes and our pool of ready material was down by 11 episodes," recalls Chopra. "We made up by working 18 hours a day, rarely stopping for a breather." Not even mishaps could slow down the break-neck pace. For instance, when one of the actors suffered a serious injury, Chopra improvised with a stand-in and then later inserted close-ups of the actor.

And after all that, Gufi Paintal, production controller, who also doubled as an actor in *Mahabharat*, says with justifiable pride: "We made every effort to make *Mahabharat* on a grand scale. It didn't matter that we were making it for the small screen.



The effort that we put in—in our characterisations, sets, costumes, special effects—shows. Ours can be compared with any of the world's best productions, even *Ben Hur* or the *Ten Commandments*." Tall talk? Perhaps, but the Chopras never did shy away from controversy

In fact, they had their first taste of controversy right after the serial went on the air. Critics accused the Chopras of shrewdly using King Bharat (played by Raj Babbar)—who chose Bhumanyu, as the heir to his empire and not any of his sons—to comment against present-day dynastic rule. Rumours that Mandi House had deleted some crucial dialogues and Doordarshan bosses had voiced their displeasure at the politicisation of an epic raged, even as the filmmakers vociferously denied them

But as it later turned out, far from going in for intellectually stimulating interpretations, the Chopras preferred



■ Bharadwaj signs autographs: from the gods, with love; (right) an actor takes a break: on the ball

to tread the path of the straight and narrow. "The key to the success of *Mahabharat* was the fact that it didn't run counter to preconceived notions that people have harboured for generations," explains Ravi Chopra. If anything, he indulged in all the usual, *filmi* tricks to reinforce these

populist images.

Another criticism of the serial is that it is too gimmicky. The Arjun-Subhadra nuptial scene—complete with song and visuals of rose petals showering down on the couple—is cited as an instance of the vulgarisation of the *Mahabharat*. But Chopra



## BACK TO THE PAST

*After Mahabharat, religious and historical extravaganzas are the rage*

Big is beautiful, opulence is in and every filmmaker worth his mega-millions is making mythological, costume dramas, historical or period films. It was *Ramayan* that showed the way. And *Mahabharat*'s phenomenal success only proved what many among them already knew: it's back to the past. Now, besides the one on the Bible, there are a host of television serials and film projects in the pipeline which are flogging the back-to-the-roots theme to death. Whether it's O.P. Ralhan's long-delayed *Ashoka The Great*, Sanjay Khan's controversial *The Sword Of Tipu Sultan*, debutant Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's 26-episode serial *Chanakya* or Ramanand Sagar's *Krishna*, filmmakers are bent on making hay while Doordarshan bosses smile benignly at these proposals

A couple of them, such as *Viswamitra* and *Panchatantra Se*, have already bagged prime-time slots. And there are still more in the

offing. Doordarshan officials seem to feel that with burgeoning interest in religion-oriented serials, these should be awarded prime-time Sunday morning viewing slots. Dr Rahi Masoom Raza, script-writer of *Mahabharat*, who is also scripting many of these films/

serials, including Salma Sultan's *Panchatantra Se*, Ralhan's *Ashoka*, and assorted others titled *Om, Jai Mataji* and *Vaishali Ki Nagar Vadhu*, says, "People are so disgusted with the present that they are trying to go back into the past to see where they went wrong."

There is no harm in the return-to-religion films, feels Raza, provided they are "dealt with cautiously and carefully". He adds: "From a certain point of view they are healthy because they promote better values, but from another point of view, they are reactionary, as there is a danger of strengthen-



■ A sketch done for the publicity of *Ashoka The Great*: long-delayed serial; (above) Sanjay Khan as Tipu Sultan: controversial





**A star off-duty: the image goes up in smoke; (right) Arjun makes up: dressed to kill**



GAUTAM PATOLE

and company dismiss such criticism as "non-constructive and petulant". Says Arjun, who plays the role of his namesake in the serial "Rather, it's the glamorisation of a mundane scene. Okay, so we did take some poetic licence, but one has to do these things when one is dealing with the audio-

visual medium." Adds Bharat Dabholkar, ad man and *Mahabharat* buff "You can't make such a serial too subtle. There has to be a certain amount of garishness, otherwise it would become too urban-oriented. After all, the filmmakers are catering to the lowest common denominator,

ing fundamentalists as well." Ramanand Sagar, whose avowed "mission in life is to propagate the *Bhagwad Mahapurana*", which is considered to be the last word in Hindu philosophy, thinks that the uproar against religion-oriented films has been created purely by the media. "I never propagated communal values in *Ramayan* but human values. It was the media which gave it a political colour. If anything, *Ramayan* has helped the country because it's proved to be the greatest unifying force."

Sagar who has already begun shooting his *Krishna* in UMBERGAON is, however, not making his serial for Doordarshan this time. He says: "When I made *Ramayan* I wasn't paid any fancy price by the sponsors. In fact, I spent much more than I earned. This time though, I'm making it for the video circuit and if Doordarshan is interested in showing it, I've no objections."

While Sagar is obviously a man with a mission, so is O.P. Ralhan whose efforts to launch *Ashoka The Great* began way back in 1978. His film was to have been an Indo-US collaboration and it was billed at US \$15 million. But the deal was scuttled when Ralhan realised that he wouldn't have the final say in its production. In 1987,

the project was revived only to be shelved yet again. This time, the US promoter Joseph Bolker who was to have provided the major part of the finance—a mind-boggling US \$25 million—died just when the project was to be launched.

But Ralhan, it seems, will be third time lucky. The plan is to make a 52-episode serial, which will be marketed in India and the US, and later in the Far East. The cost is estimated at US \$40 million. Ralhan, like Sagar, is having nothing to do with Mandi House, unless, of course, Doordarshan offers to telecast it. Ralhan, who has been obsessed with the idea of making a film on Ashoka, has gone to great lengths to get as much authentic material on the subject as possible. He expects to begin shooting on 2 October this year.

Another project dealing with the same period is Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's *Chanakya*. He has already got Doordarshan's go-ahead to shoot 26 episodes and hopes that by the time these are telecast Mandi House will have cleared his application for an extension up to 52 episodes.

Doordarshan and sponsors willing, it's back to the past, with a bang.

and some poetic licence is inevitable."

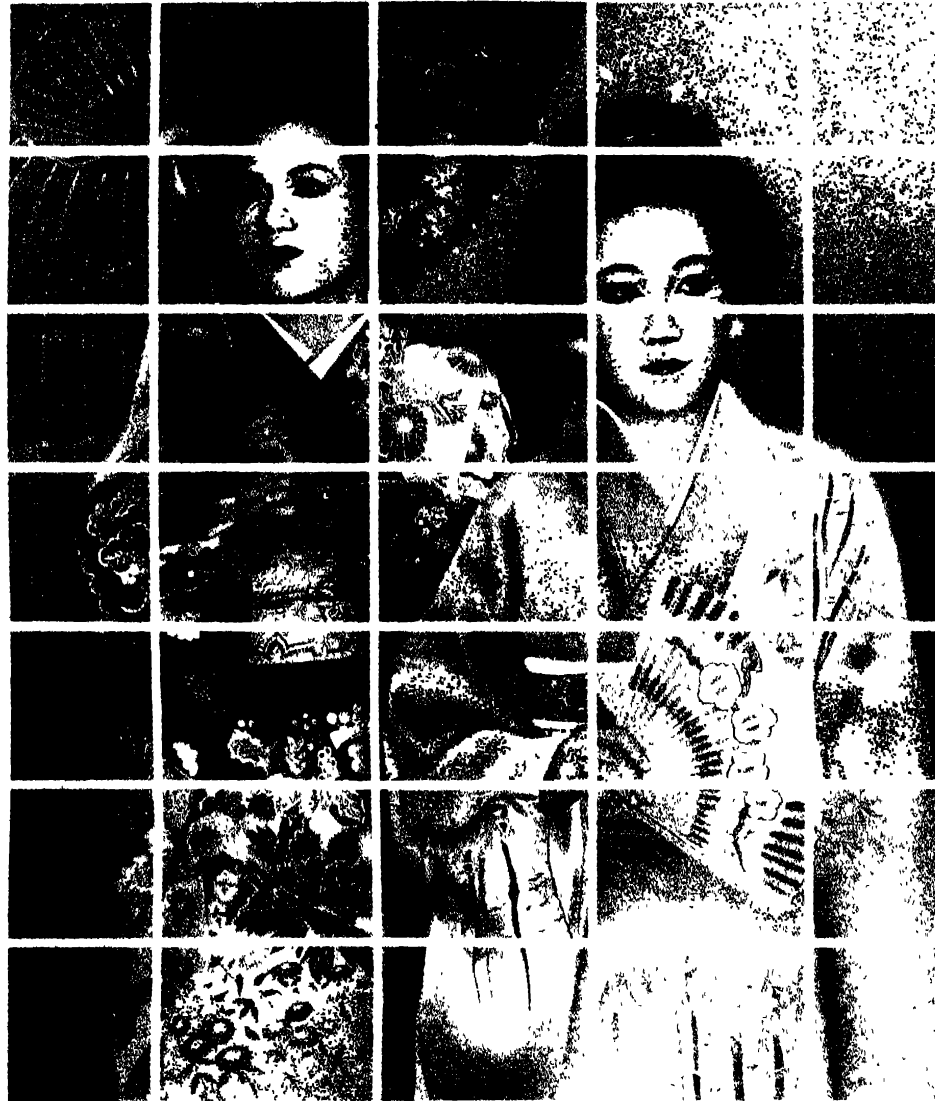
But did the filmmakers take one poetic licence too many? Chopra and script-writer Dr Ravi Masoom Raza argue that they have remained as true to the epic as humanly possible. And helping them in this task were the scholars of the Bhandarkar Institute for Oriental Studies, Pune. Raza admits though that "often we had differences of opinion on the issue of interpretation and in such cases we stuck to ours". The upshot has been that some episodes have caused a major uproar among Sanskrit scholars. For instance, the one in which Duryodhan is depicted as having molested a Gandharv girl "Nowhere in the original epic does Ved Vyas talk about Duryodhan molesting a Gandharv girl," says Prof S G. Shevde, Sanskrit scholar and *pravabhanakar*. In fact, he maintains that there are as many as "three to four factual errors in almost every episode". Though Raza admits having made a "mistake", he still defends his point of view. "If a man is so dehumanised that he can try to disrobe his own *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) in a durbar, why can't such a man molest an ordinary girl?"

Puneet Issar, who plays Duryodhan in the serial, however, feels that though the scene shouldn't have been included, the filmmakers felt it necessary to explain certain actions of the Kauravs (in this case the Kaurav-Gandharv conflict) or Pandavs wherever the original work is silent on these issues. "By adding the bit about the Gandharv girl and Duryodhan," says Issar, "the Chopras are guilty of turning Duryodhan into a *film* villain prototype."

By and large, though, Raza feels that criticism against the *Mahabharat* has been "biased". "When you're dealing with an epic of this nature, there are certain points of identification. The people have been living with these characters for centuries and we can't dare to demolish the popular physical characteristics that have been imparted to these personae. This was the mistake that Shyam Benegal made when he dealt with legendary figures in his (teleserial) *Discovery Of India*. As for Peter Brook he wasn't competent enough to understand the complexities of the epic." Raza, however, reserves the most scathing criticism for the "elitist media" and the "pseudo Hindus who can't digest the fact that a Ravi Masoom Raza, a non-Hindu, has written *Mahabharat*".



Performance that's out  
to capture a lot of fans.



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# VIDEOCON

AIR CONDITIONERS

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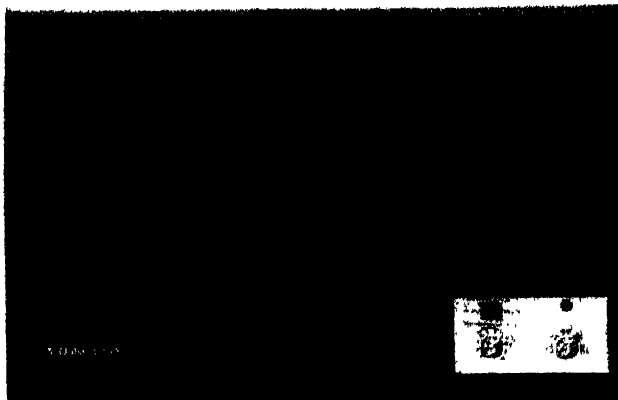
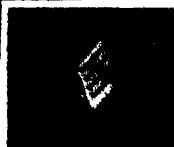
The Videocon Air Conditioner incorporates an ultra thin heat exchanger and specially designed sirocco fan, propeller fan, fan motor and rotary compressor. What's more, the rotary compressor is mounted on a vibration-absorbing rubber base and the entire air conditioner housed in heavy insulation.

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Engineered to operate on as little energy as possible, it can save on electricity bills. All this being possible due to the Louver Fins, Grooved Copper Tubing and the Rotary Compressor.



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- Yes, I am impressed with the features of the
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● Name

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● Organisation

● Address

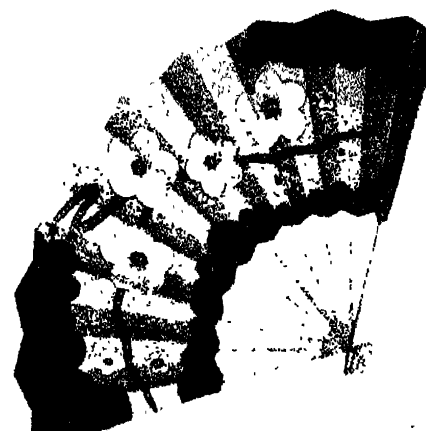
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Yet, ironically, it's the media critics who have charged the Raza-Chopra team of propagating religious chauvinism through the small screen. Says television critic Iqbal Masud, "Chopra's *Mahabharat* has continued a process that was started by Sagar's *Ramayan*: that of thrusting religion down our throats. There's nothing philosophical about Chopra's *Mahabharat*, it's just glorification of war heroism."

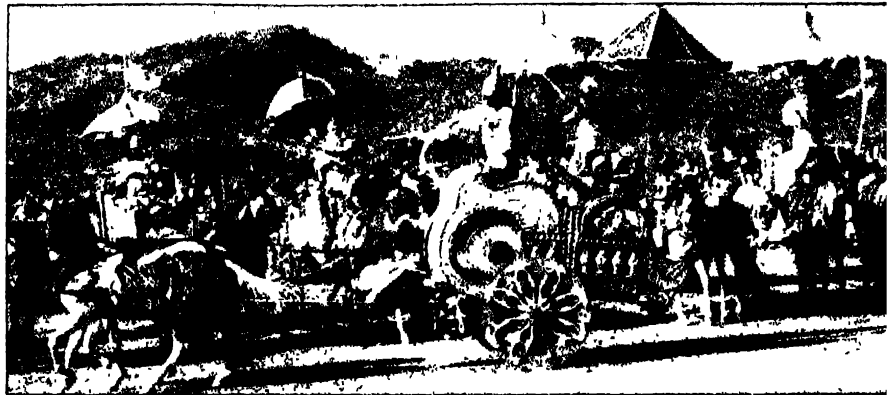
**S**uch criticism does not worry the Chopras. And why should it? For two and a half years, their *magnum opus* has been the topic of discussion at countless dinner tables all over the country and even those who are critical of the "trashy, *film* execution" are drawn to their television sets every Sunday morning. "We are continuously getting feedback on every episode that goes on the air," says Chopra. "Men, women and youngsters have called me up umpteen times to congratulate me or discuss some episode/

incident with me. And even though I may not know them (personally), there are some of my fans whom I know by name." Since the bouquets far outnumber the brickbats, small wonder then that the Chopras are so smug about the phenomenal success of their serial.

*Buniyaad* may have been the *Sholay*

of soap operas, but *Mahabharat* has set new trends in popularity ratings. As Chopra says, "People often come up to me and say, 'What are we going to do on Sunday mornings when *Mahabharat* is over?' And I tell them 'I wonder what I am going to do on Monday mornings when I won't have to rush off for shooting.'" Gufi Paintal

## DHARMA YUDH



## MAHA POPULAR

*Copywriters cash in on the serial's popularity to sell their products*

**W**hen Bhishma took his *pragya*, Bharat Dabholkar of da Cunha Associates rejoiced. When Krishna supplied yards of silk to drape Draupadi, Binny's got ready to launch their advertising offensive and scores of enterprising marketing men and innovative copywriters got into the act. The *Mahabharat* bandwagon beckoned and most were only too eager to jump on. There was Dabholkar's brilliant ("I vow never to eat anything but Amul butter... It's *Maha* popular in *Bharat*") Amul campaign; Binny's marketing gimmick of introducing the 'Draupadi sari' and Hotel Palm Grove's almost-permanent banner, which reads, "After the *Mahabharat* enjoy our Mahabuffet." As Sarang Panchal of MRAS/Burke says: "*Mahabharat* provided a good cue to advertisers."

Among the others who exploited the *Mahabharat* theme in the hope that "identification would contri-

bute favourably to high ad recall" was Larsen & Toubro, which launched a debenture issue with a visual of the *kaal chakra* and a voice-over

■ **Bharat Dabholkar: taking off on *Mahabharat***



which began, *Mai samay hoon*. Then there was Gufi Paintal and Puneet Issar doing the *mamashree-bhanje* act to sell Crown TV. The ad agency da Cunha Associates has just finished filming a campaign for Gemini, a Tata Tea brand, which inspired by the serial and there is another by HMT watches which harps on a similar theme. Says Dabholkar: "A popular serial like this gives us a chance to do take-offs. But it's not a phenomenon peculiar to *Mahabharat* alone. It happened with *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad* too." He adds, "The only exception was *Ramayan*, because one couldn't be too flippant dealing with Ram or Sita." Nevertheless, Dabholkar did a "Rav-ously hungry" catchline for his Amul Butter campaign.

But Dabholkar also feels that there is a risk involved with such "celebrity advertising". He says, "There is always the danger that the mega-image of the serial will dwarf the product." Concurs Panchal, "In the case of slotting of TV commercials, too, there is a chance that an ad may be lost in the clutter of advertisements just before a programme like *Mahabharat*." But that didn't deter





DURGAPRASAD

echoes this sentiment. "It will take some time to get used to the more relaxed pace of life." But it's the camaraderie and easy rapport that everyone is going to miss the most. As Arjun puts it, "We have been living, sleeping, eating, breathing *Mahabharat* and suddenly there won't be any *Mahabharat* to go back to. It's inevit-

scores of advertisers from using the slot even though they had to pay a very steep price for it. According to Panchal, "Those who wanted to play it safe opted for *Mahabharat* which has a huge viewership. But, ultimately, one wonders whether it is worth the price."

The biggest gainers in this advertisement-teleserial nexus was, of course, Doordarshan, which would, at regular intervals, hike up its advertising rates. And in view of the serial's tremendous popularity, it created a special pre-*Mahabharat* advertising slot for which the rate was recently revised to Rs 1.25 lakhs per ten seconds. The post-*Mahabharat* slot too commands a high price of about Rs 75,000. As Ravi Chopra points out: "Doordarshan recently declared its revenues for the last year to be around Rs 169 crores. From this, ad revenues per episode of *Mahabharat* must be around Rs 90 lakhs."

With the epic scheduled to end in July, both advertisers and Doordarshan will have to find some other money-spinner. And so, until another *Mahabharat*-clone comes along, it's goodbye to a whole genre of ad fads and Machiavellian marketing.

able that once we stop seeing each other, it won't be the same any more."

Not that they didn't have their moments of strained relations or moments when bruised egos wrought havoc on the atmosphere of good cheer and *bonhomie*. Says Nitish Bharadwaj: "Wherever there are strong incentives of fame and power, these undercurrents of jealousy will always be there. But it was all very subtle, very manageable." And then adds, in a vein that would do his screen-avatar Krishna proud, "But these are essential experiences in life and they have given me the confidence to tackle different kinds of people and situations."

The ultimate test of this experience, however, would be in their ability to cope with life after *Mahabharat*. Puneet Issar, who has no pretensions about his station in life, says, "I believe in the dictum, 'Make hay while the sun shines'. Once *Mahabharat* is over, no one's going to remember any of us. I was lucky that I landed such a tremendous role in *Mahabharat*, but I'm accepting everything that comes my way—whether it's A-grade or C-grade roles. After all, I'm here to make money." At the other end of the spectrum is Nitish 'Krishna' Bharadwaj, a one-time vet, who's "picking and choosing" his roles. "The *Mahabharat* is going to be the first milestone in a long career ahead," he asserts. "The race has just begun." Adopting a middle-of-the-road stance, Arjun says: "Till the time the serial is on, you're at the top. After that it's *jana, gana, mana*. Of course, we will get a better deal now that we have already proved our talent."

Nevertheless, the spectre of being reduced to a one-serial wonder must surely haunt our celluloid gods. Any

suggestions that they might just meet the same fate as Arun Govil or Anita Kanwar is quickly brushed aside with the response "Look at Mukesh Khanna (who plays Bhishma in *Mahabharat*) who is going great guns. Surely for every Anita Kanwar, there's also an Alok Nath?" Few, however, are willing to admit that life after *Mahabharat* will bring new challenges, and the need to prove themselves will begin all over again.

But that time is still two months away and the serial has still to run through its final act—one that could prove to be the most controversial yet. While the filmmakers have planned to end the drama on what they describe as "a positive note", with the coronation of the eldest Pandav, Yudhishthir, scholars have already begun sounding off on this "unauthentic" approach. As one research scholar points out: "The story of *Mahabharat* doesn't end with 'and they lived happily ever after', which the Chopras have tried to do. There's a deep philosophical and political comment against war." The Pandavs quit war-ravaged Hastinapur and finally meet an ignominious end in the original epic. But the Chopras argue, in true *filmi* tradition, that to depict anything that would demolish the greatness of these characters, which the serial has so assiduously built up, would be anti-climactic.

Therefore, ultimately, *Mahabharat* will be the triumph of screenplay over verse. No anti-climaxes or quiet exits for the movie moghuls. The spectacle-spinners are going to lay it on thick. So, bring out the conches, the trumpets and the gold-trimmed props. The Chopras are determined to take their bows in a blaze of garish colour, glory and controversy. ●

**Adite Chatterjee/Bombay**



## COMPANIES

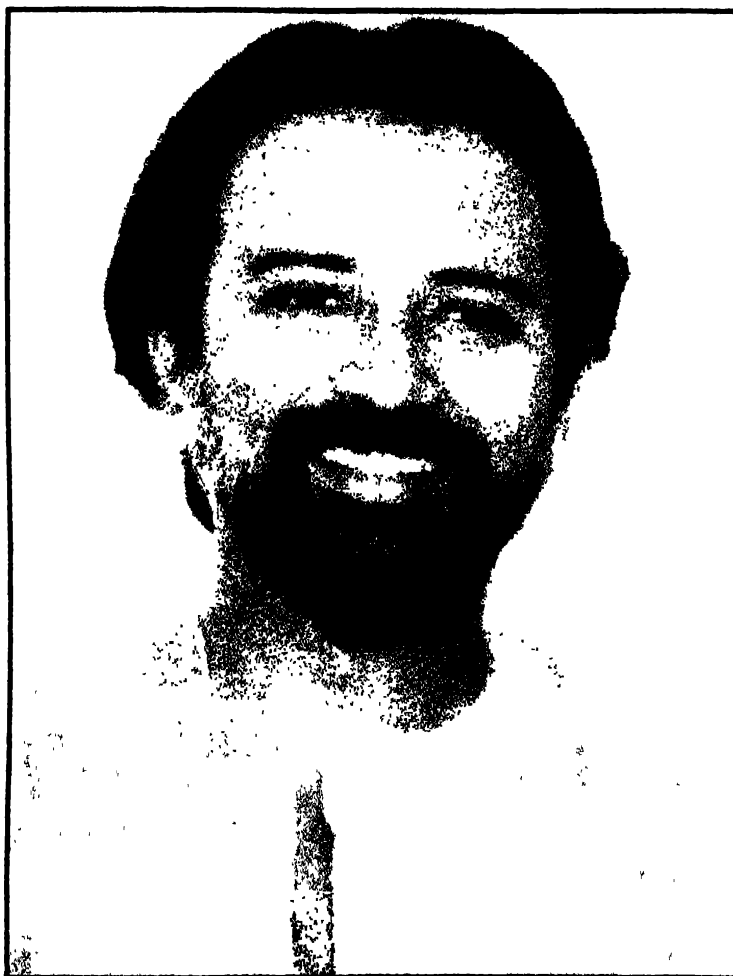
# A fast pace

*That is what Ravi Mammen prescribed for MRF, and the company is paying him a tribute by sticking to it after his tragic death*

**T**he company started out with the somewhat frivolous objective of selling balloons. But in a span of 40 years, the diminutive Madras Rubber Factory has emerged as the leader of the Indian tyre industry, topping the charts in its new incarnation, as MRF Ltd. What really stands out is the company's growth in the past four years. Sales almost trebled between 1986 and 1989, from Rs 266.65 crores to Rs 742.47 crores. Net profit climbed from Rs 2.85 crores on 31 March, 1986 to Rs 25 crores at end-March 1989, a jump almost nine times over.

Branching out from tyres—where it has eclipsed the traditional number one, Dunlop India Ltd.—MRF has spread its wings. A new subsidiary, Funkskool India Ltd, is a collaboration with Hasbro Inc. of the US, the world's largest toy makers. A new MRF division will manufacture speciality paints in a tie-up with Australian company Vapocure, putting it in the same league as DuPont and Sumitomo Corp., Vapocure's other licencees. Through its trading operations, the company expects to export Rs 100 crores worth of leather goods, spices and cashew-nuts worldwide, placing it among the top trading houses of India.

And with an advertising blitz that spans the print and electronic media, international class cricket and car rac-



**Ravi Mammen: visionary manager**

ing sponsorships, MRF's image now is that of a dynamic, motivated company, and one which has made inroads into the consciousness of possibly every urban Indian household. "The tyres we race are the tyres you buy," goes an MRF ad refrain, stressing the toughness of its products. It works. When the company launched its "Nylogrip" range of tyres in 1984, it was not uncommon for consumers to line up at the competition's doorsteps, asking for "Dunlop-Nylogrip", similar

to people asking for "Surf" when they mean "washing powder". When a brandname goes generic, it time to claim success.

The credit for which, say most corporate observers, should go to Ravi Mammen, rated as one of India's top managers. Ravi turned the company around from a slow-paced, conservative, closely-held outfit to an energetic heavyweight. Tragically, he died of a heart attack on 25 March, after an hour-long swim at a Mahabalipuram resort. It was his time off, after a typically hectic week's work which took him round the world. To the International Toy Fair in New York, a visit to the Uniroyal Goodrich Tyre Co. in the US to discuss new technology, to Paris for a discussion on a tie-up with Michelin for aero tyres, and to Goa, to check on MRF's tyre and toy operations. The livewire managing director was only 39 years old.

With Ravi's death, the first question raised by the corporate world was whether the company would be able to hold on to the pace of growth, its plans and its aggressive marketing orientation (MRF spent nearly Rs one crore to sponsor the Nehru Cup international cricket tournament last year). Company executives have drawn close together, and decline to answer queries. "We are having traumatic changes here," says MRF marketing director Philip Eapen. "We do not



want to talk to the press at this juncture."

**H**owever, the world has made up its mind. For example, MRF share prices (at a steady Rs 210) did not drop with the news of Ravi's death, in complete contrast to a situation two years ago, when Dhirubhai Ambani's illness sent Reliance Industries Ltd shares into a tailspin. And the trauma which Eapen talks about has perhaps more to do with Ravi's loss than a crisis of alignment in the family-run concern. Chairman K M. Mammen Mappilai and vice-chairman K M. "Vinoo" Mammen pulled themselves together after the loss of a son and a younger brother, and just a couple of days after Ravi's death, the MRF board resolved to "improve the pace of growth by a hundred per cent, as only that would please Ravi's soul", says a senior company executive who declines to be identified. Also, the family broke the orthodox Kottayam Syrian Christian taboo on women entering business, and inducted Ravi's wife Meera as a director on the company's board. "Vinoo has told us there will be no let up," says the executive. "In fact, he says MRF will step up (its activities) on all fronts, including sports sponsorship."

This can only help. It took a long while to get MRF where it is, and slacking off at this point would be disastrous.

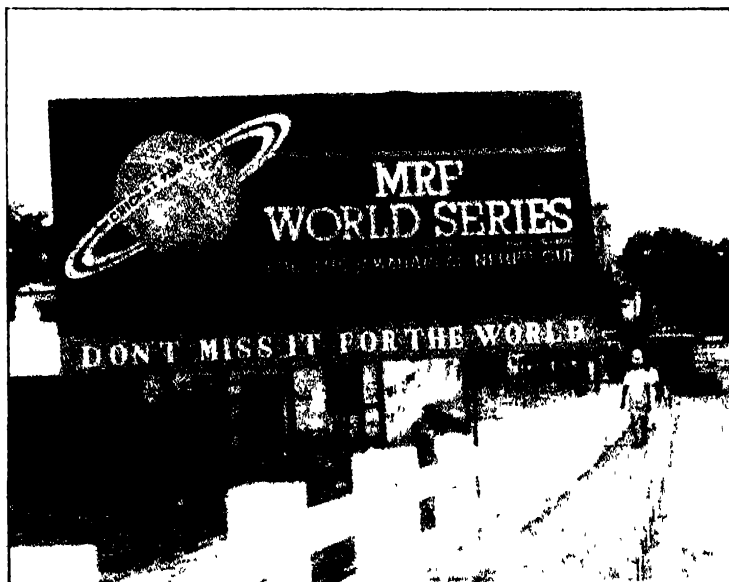
The company first slugged it out with the competition in 1973-74, when tyre companies increased their production capacities. Shortages disappeared almost overnight, and a sellers market turned into a hard-fought scramble where the customer was king. And a king who demanded quality. "They (the competition) were waiting to beat us up at the sales counters," recalls a top MRF executive. Added to this was the fact the company received poor feedback from its customers, which forced it to tight-

en up on the shop-floor in a bid to improve quality.

This is when Ravi stepped in. He shouldered the major responsibility of keeping the company afloat, helped along by Vinoo, during the late Seventies and the early Eighties. After setting the house in order, Ravi plumed for a pushy advertising and marketing strategy Ravi got up, all excited, at a marathon board meeting about three years ago, says a company official, and clinically told the top brass about MRF's strengths and

the potential of television advertising when Doordarshan opened its doors wide to sponsors in 1984. This understanding led the company to sponsor TV sports shows, for a start, and then move on to prime-time slots and sponsoring high-coverage events such as cricket tournaments, and formula car and motorcycle races. And to keep the company's image in the news, backing efforts to train budding soccer players and fast bowlers for Indian cricket, were the next two logical steps.

**MRF hit the headlines with its advertising blitz at sporting events and later, by sponsoring them**



**Racing cars for an unbeatable slogan: "The tyres we race are the tyres you buy"**

weaknesses. He had his say, and was given the responsibility of chalking out company strategy. It has obviously worked: MRF emerged as the top tyre company in three years. The company pushed for original equipment status for the new breed of vehicles, and MRF tyres are now a standard feature for the Maruti, the Contessa, Eicher Mitsubishi and Tata light commercial trucks, and Bajaj two-wheelers, among others.

Thanks to Ravi, again, MRF was one of the first companies to realise

And it brought Ravi—and his company—a level of recognition that many managers hope for, but rarely achieve, especially in India. His customers are not complaining, that is accolade enough. But what would have gladdened the dynamic businessman's heart was the scene at his funeral. His family and colleagues from MRF were in attendance. But with them—and outnumbering them by the thousands—were youngsters from all over Madras. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**





KRISHAN SAITH

It is difficult to miss. In the up-market but rapidly deteriorating Civil Lines area of Kanpur stand two gleaming multi-storied buildings, surrounded by sprawling, well-kept lawns, bordered by exotic flowers and shrubs. As you make your way towards the entrance, liveried *durwans* usher you in to a carpeted foyer. A flight of descending stairs lead you to a basement swimming pool, next to a health club. On the first floor, there is a plush restaurant, complete with dim lights and strains of a disco beat.

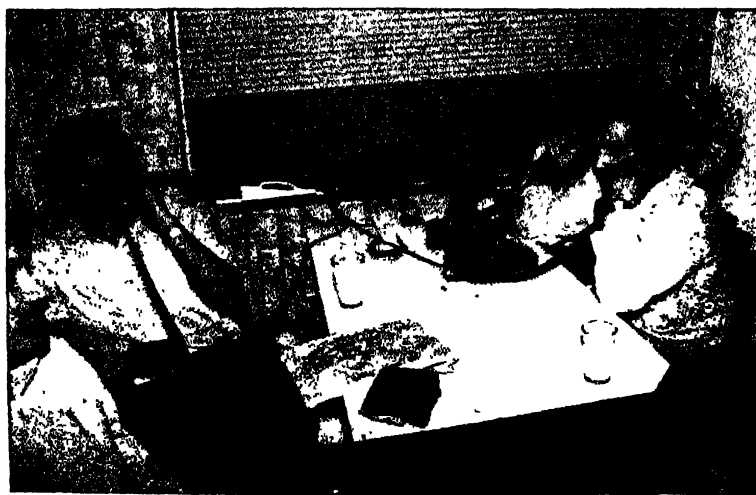
Welcome to the UP Stock Exchange (UPSE), Kanpur's pride and Uttar Pradesh's swanky financial nerve centre. Here, brokers work on computers, and when computerisation is completed at the end of this year, even trading will be conducted at the touch of a button. The way it is going, the UPSE is probably going to win the automation stakes way ahead of its vaunted counterpart, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), where computerisation is a much-maligned buzzword—the brokers there are trying their best not to let it happen. Automation would deprive them of the benefits of wrongly billing their clients by suppressing

actual buy-sell prices and grabbing a deal or two through insider trading.

Perhaps Bombay stock marketmen, and their counterparts in the 14 exchanges strung across the country, would do well to take a lesson from their UPSE brethren. Then, maybe, they would not miss out on a sauna after a hectic trading session. Says K B Aggarwal, UPSE's president: "We were toying with an idea which would be a trend-setter of sorts."

The idea took almost three decades to take shape. Aggarwal says that in 1962, when the JK Organisation company JK Rayon was launched, the promoters required Rs 60 lakhs in

**Brokers at the UPSE: a chance to mix work and leisure**



KRISHAN SAITH

capital. But investors from the metros were unwilling to put their money in a UP-based concern, and the Singhanias family had to pump in their own funds to fill the subscription. Unnerved by this sort of financial burden, the Kanpur-based Singhanias tried to get businessmen in the state interested in a home-grown stock exchange.

It did not work. The idea lay in cold storage till 1975, when Aggarwal, who was appointed as chairman of the UP Chamber of Commerce's banking and fiscal committee, took the first tentative steps. Whenever a UP-based company's capital issue was floated, he collected

data on the number of applications received, the amount collected by the companies in various banks, the company's paid-up capital, generally every kind of financial information available on the firm. "It became abundantly clear," says Aggarwal, "that new enterprises in UP which required capital were totally dependant on Bombay, the hub of financial activity. The state's entrepreneurs were severely handicapped" (Today, new companies set up in UP raise most of their capital from UP investors, thanks to the UPSE.).

The spadework over, Aggarwal prevailed on some local businessmen to back his idea of a stock exchange in Kanpur. The government granted

a license in June, 1982. The problem of where the exchange would be housed was solved when Gaur Hari Singhanias, vice-president of the JK Organisation, offered part of the family-held merchant's chamber complex. On 27 August the same year, the UPSE became functional with 350 brokers on the rolls.

"But we were functioning under miserable conditions," says Aggarwal, "in cramped and congested premises."



He adds: "Most of the existing exchanges were constructed when designers could not envisage the terrific growth in business activities, the infrastructure that would be required to cope with them, as a result of which they are overcrowded. I wanted a place which would be centrally air-conditioned (hear that, BSE?), yet retain a natural look with lawns and gardens, a place where brokers could have leisure facilities, a library, and an auditorium."

Fortunately for Aggarwal, he had the backing of the state's industrialists. He commissioned a Lucknow-based firm of architects to visit European stock exchanges, while he picked up first-hand information on how a stock exchange ought to look and be run from visits to the New York Stock Exchange. It took Rs three crores to set up the new UPSE complex. The brokers chipped in with Rs 50,000



**K.B. Aggarwal: trend-setter**

advances each—as part payment for their cabins—and the Singhanias and Aggarwal himself helped out with the rest.

Now, the exchange has 500 brokers, 1,500 sub-brokers, and a turnover of Rs 1,400 crores a year, which ranks the UPSE sixth in terms of trade volume in the country. "Modest," admits Aggarwal, "when compared to say (exchanges) in Bombay or New Delhi. But we have the most modern infrastructure." Aggarwal and his flock can rest easy. The UPSE may be small in comparison to the country's top exchanges, but when it has facilities which resemble Wall Street more than Dalal Street, fame and prominence are not very far away. •

**Radhika Ramaseshan/Kanpur**

## TEA

# Guess who's coming to tea?

*Assam's terrorists, says a nervous industry, and this could upset its big plans*

**T**he Indian tea industry has never had it so good. In calendar 1989, the country exported 223 million kgs of tea, earning over Rs 800 crores. And 1990 is expected to create a record of sorts. "All things being well," says the managing director of a large Calcutta-based tea firm, who declines to be identified like most industry executives interviewed for this article, "the industry's objective is to ensure that foreign exchange earnings go over Rs 1,000 crores."

Keeping in tune with this projection, production is high. This year—provided the weather is kind—India is estimated to produce 700 million kgs of tea, 16 million kgs more than in 1989. "The industry has a tremendous future," says a senior executive of J. Thomas & Co., the country's largest tea broking house.

However, unfavourable weather conditions apart, the tea industry's "tremendous future" could go all awry, if it has to contend with the terrorist activities of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). This may adversely affect tea production. "Why link ULFA and tea?" asks an outraged—and somewhat nervous—chief executive of a tea company. Because the ULFA wants a "sovereign socialist Assam". And it

believes that its goal can be achieved by striking at the business community in the state. Assam's biggest money-spinner is the tea trade, managed mostly by non-Assamese businessmen and business houses. Almost 60 per cent of India's tea crop is grown in Assam—the rest split between estates in North Bengal and in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu—and accounts for 65 per cent of the industry's exports. A little ripple in Assam could signify a big loss of revenue. And what is especially worrying is the fact that besides ULFA,

other militant groups in the state—the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), All Cachar Students Association (ACSA)—are also gunning for business interests in Assam.

The debate about the tea industry's future began in earnest on 9 April, when ULFA militants shot dead industrialist Surrendra Paul, chairman of the Assam Frontier tea company, near Tinsukia in Upper Assam (three weeks earlier, a Tata Tea scientist was killed in an ambush in Nalbari). A few days later, a tea garden manager and his wife were brutally hacked to death in Cachar district. The story doing the rounds is that ULFA activists were not involved, and that local hoodlums were using the terrorist organisation's cover to unleash their own brand of terror. A day before the couple was murdered, the road link between Assam and the rest of the country was disrupted when suspected ABSU militants blew up a section of the bridge over the Manas river near Bijnai, in Kokrajhar district. This has stalled the movement of tea from Assam to the rest of the country. Despite the fact that this is a temporary setback—bridges can always be fixed—it has served to add to the confusion and panic that is already endemic in the tea industry.

**The tea industry's "tremendous future" could go all awry, if it has to contend with the terrorist activities of the ULFA**

"All right," admits a top Calcutta-based industry executive. "We agree that there is a fear psychosis prevalent among the people, but so far, tea production has not been adversely affected. Quite the contrary." But what happens if the situation worsens? There is already a deep feeling of apprehension among managers in Assam. "But their morale is high," counters the J. Thomas executive. "They are not panic-stricken and have no plans of either shifting or abandoning their tea gardens."



*What did Sigmund Freud of  
Germany say to the Skypak Man?  
"You move so fast... aren't you  
afraid of the Freudian slip?"*



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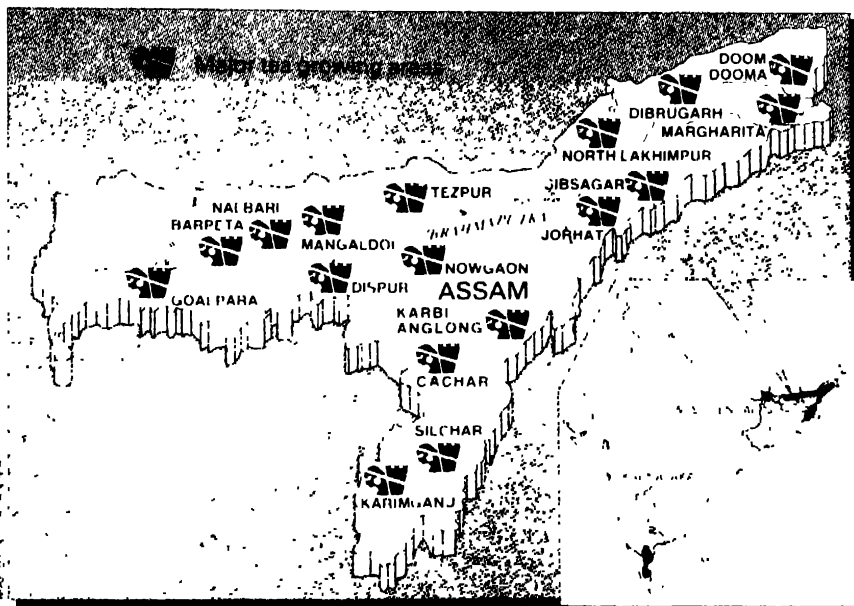
Some planters, however, have a different story to tell. They may not yet be thinking about abandoning their gardens but there is no doubt, says the managing director of a leading tea firm, that their lifestyles have altered drastically. Says a planter who

that only the Assamese be appointed as tea garden managers "Just a temporary hiccup," says a senior industry executive in Calcutta. "They (the estate managers) are a tough bunch. (There is a story of how a manager, when faced with an armed

tion Front and in the Seventies, the Naxalite movement—and has survived them all." He adds "All through these turmoil-filled months, production of tea has never dropped. We are not worried about profits dropping either. And the ULFA can't really afford to touch tea, it is as vital to their economy as it is to the rest of the country. After all, the Assam tea industry directly employs half-a-million labourers." Says Ajay Jain, personnel manager with Goodricke Group, a major tea producer "The tea has to be sent out of Assam. One can't drink it all there."

Reflecting this attitude, none of the major tea companies has made contingency plans. They hope that central government intervention—commerce minister Arun Nehru is making noises about a settlement—will prevent Assam from turning into another Punjab, or Kashmir. Says a senior industry executive "We are over-reacting to the whole situation. Basically, the Centre and the state government have never really appreciated the problem there (in Assam). But I have a lot of faith in the people of Assam. If tomorrow, a (tea) garden comes up for sale - and it is commercially viable—I would buy it immediately." For the moment, however, the industry is living on hope. There are enough examples of militant movements ignoring economic realities. If that happens in Assam, extremists could shatter the Rs 1,000 crore tea dream. •

**Subodhra Rangamani/Calcutta**



**Assam's tea growing areas: far flung, inadequately protected and wide open to terrorist threats**

left the state last week "Police stations are 20-25 kms away, and by the time the police arrive, it is too late." The fact that tea estates are so far flung gives rise to problems anyway "Life is tough for the average planter," says the recent evacuee "Shops, social life and entertainment, you can't take these for granted. Now, added to the loneliness, one has to cope with fear and insecurity."

And extortion demands. A tea garden manager who filed a First Information Report against the ULFA was forcibly taken to their hide-out, made to withdraw the complaint and cough up Rs 3 lakhs before being let off by the terrorists. Industry grapevine has it that the ULFA demanded Rs 50 lakhs from Paul a year ago, but in typical style, the industrialist ignored the missive. The ULFA cadres were livid, they felt that the amount was peanuts, as they were regularly extorting Rs 5 to 10 lakhs from more downscale businessmen. They were waiting for an opportunity to hit back at Paul. They did not have to wait too long.

Money is not the only requisite for a militant. Bicycles, jeeps, tractors are "requisitioned" as a matter of course. Recently, the ULFA has demanded

mob, calmly shot dead a person who attacked him with a machete, and broke up the crowd.) No doubt the ULFA is a force to reckon with, but the tea industry has weathered worse problems—the All Assam Students Union, the Gorkha National Libera-

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

# Get Sam—now!

*Pitroda loses control of C-DoT, but he is still in the game*

**S**am Pitroda is a past master at putting up brave fronts, but even he would find it a little difficult to absorb the latest development. Pitroda, who set up the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) five years ago, was sacked as its adviser and vice-chairman of its governing council last week. According to government officials, the new minister of state for communications, Janeshwar Mishra, passed the orders after receiv-

ing a note from the Cabinet secretariat.

Pitroda's removal appears to be a direct result of an enquiry about C-DoT's working, or non-working, as the agency's critics refer to it. It basically revolves around C-DoT falling way behind in its promised delivery of two much-touted telephone switching systems, the Main Automatic Exchange, which would network telephone systems in the metros,



and the smaller Rural Automatic Exchange. Somewhat more pressing are the accusations levelled by the 13-member enquiry team, that two of Pitroda's family-run companies in the US, Martek Inc. and Micro Technologies Inc., supplied about US \$ 50,000 worth of telecom equipment to C-DoT, ET & T and Indian Telephone Industries (ITI). Last month, the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) was asked to find out whether a detailed investigation was worth it.



**Sam Pitroda: sacked from C-DoT, but still the overlord of the telecom sector**



**K.P. Unnikrishnan: victory, still far away**

munications ministry, Mishra, is believed to be completely devoid of an independent streak, and is expected to do just what the Raja asks of him. Mishra is a Devi Lal loyalist, but knows who the boss is.) Pande knows the being-gunned-for feeling. A competent bureaucrat, he was expected to be in the dog house after V.P. Singh lost his finance portfolio under the Rajiv Gandhi administration. But he was too valuable an officer to keep down, and Rajiv realised this in fact,

Government officials say that Pitroda's removal from the C-DoT posts is the correct thing to do, because there would be a conflict of interest if Sam were to retain his links with C-DoT while the investigations were in progress. In fact, A S Wakhle, member (services) of the Telecom Commission, ordered that all C-DoT files and papers should be kept out of Pitroda's reach.

Round two to K P. Unnikrishnan. The portly surface transport minister, who lost his communications portfolio to Mishra last month, must be overjoyed. Unnikrishnan and Pitroda struck a bad chord from the former's first day at work at Sanchar Bhavan last December. And ever since, Unnikrishnan has run down everything Pitroda stands for—C-DoT, telecom superiority over the West, the works. The battle became too public for the Raja's liking, say government insiders, who felt that Unnikrishnan was being plainly vindictive. Therefore, he had to go. Now, with Pitroda out of C-DoT, the opinion is that V P Singh has changed his tune, and that there is some truth to what Unnikrishnan has been saying all along.

Only, this is the generally accepted theory. The Raja is a shrewd Prime Minister, perhaps the shrewdest India has seen. Sacrificing a minister has to be balanced by sacrificing the minister's target, if only to maintain the impression that he is not shortchanging a Cabinet colleague. Removing Pitroda from C-DoT was the way out.

But in the same way that Unnikrishnan remains a Cabinet minister, Pitroda has hardly lost all his clout. The fact most people missed was that Pitroda is still the chairman of the Tele-

com Commission. Moreover, he is still the telecom secretary. And the C-DoT functions directly under the department of telecommunications. Therefore, though Pitroda has been delinked from C-DoT, he is still, technically, its boss, as he remains the overlord of the entire telecom sector. The PM could have hardly missed this point.

This lends credence to the theory that Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande still holds the strings. According to government insiders, Pande—often called the second most powerful man in India—is leery of Unnikrishnan and his pet hatchet man, ex-ITI chief and conductor of the enquiry, K P P Nambiar. And that he believes Pitroda is worth his weight in telecom, a technocrat who knows what he is talking about.

This alliance is stronger than anything Unnikrishnan can ever hope to match. (His successor at the com-

**Vinod Pande: favouring Pitroda?**



Pande was brought in to help draft the Panchayati Raj Bill.

**D**itto Pitroda. He may be loud-mouthed, over confident and smug. But nobody can question his telecom knowledge. A person who created a multi-million dollar telecom operation in the US—where bluster has to be backed by competence—before he moved to India as a self-styled telecom czar, must have something to him. Pitroda has not kept his promise of giving India his brand of telephone exchanges on schedule, but the fact is that before he arrived on the scene, research and development of domestic electronic exchanges was almost non-existent. Whatever he did was a step ahead. Pande would favour Pitroda before Unnikrishnan and his ilk. Expertise has its advantages.

Moreover, Pitroda arrived in India at a time when the Raja was a top minister in the Rajiv regime, the finance minister and the *de facto* number two man in the Union Cabinet. And Pande, even then, was the Raja's right hand man. And when Pitroda wowed Rajiv Gandhi with his telecom prowess and intent for India's development, the Raja was already a Gandhi family favourite. V.P. Singh, Pande and Pitroda go a long way. They know how the other functions, how the other thinks. For all the years that Unnikrishnan was an obscure—though tenacious—politician, the threesome were in. And now, they are in still further.

The only way the Raja will wash his hands off Pitroda is if the charges about the telecom czar's alleged misdeeds stick. That is still a long way off.



The CBI's investigation is only at the preliminary stage. Only after the agency establishes that there is a prima facie case to initiate a full-fledged investigation, will Pitroda's position be a bit shaky. And if the CBI conclusively says that Pitroda is guilty of making money by endorsing Martek and Micro Technologies' products for

Indian outfits under his control, there is no one who will stand up for him. Certainly not the Raja, or Pande, or anyone familiar with the PM's mania for a 'clean' image. But till that happens, Pitroda is in the clear. Unnikrishnan's ire will have to wait a while

**Sudeep Chakravarti**

## COMPANIES

# Leveraged shake out

*Tamil Nadu chief minister Karunanidhi cracks down on SPIC*

"I am under a state of siege."

—A.C. Muthiah to his friends last week

**H**e wasn't exaggerating. For, of late, the successful south Indian industrialist has had every reason to feel hounded. Only, this was no ordinary industrial spat and what he was up against was no corporate predator. Rather, a far more formidable adversary. Tamil Nadu chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi, aided by a powerful state bureaucracy

Karunanidhi has never hidden his distaste for Muthiah, whose close links with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) chief's arch-rival, the late M.G. Ramachandran, was public knowledge and there is evidence to support Muthiah's complaint that efforts have been on to 'fix' him ever since the DMK swept the state in the January 1989 election. But on 20 April, 'State vs Muthiah' took a dramatic turn, when his father, M.A. Chidambaram, was forced out as chairman of Southern Petrochemical Industries Corp. Ltd (SPIC), the massive fertiliser company which is the flagship of the Muthiah-Chidambaram Group. Chidambaram was replaced by M.M. Rajendran, the suave and articulate chief secretary to the state government



**M.A. Chidambaram: Karunanidhi's first victim**



**A.C. Muthiah: neck on the block**

Though Muthiah was not toppled from his position as the company's vice-chairman and president, it was understandable why many believed that this was the final assault in what was described as "Karunanidhi's war of attrition". For one, SPIC was not the first Muthiah-Chidambaram Group company in which the state government had intervened to take control. And, moreover, as the flagship, it accounts for over 80 per cent of the group's turnover of Rs 570 crores.

If Muthiah has been an easy target, it is because most of his companies—with one exception—are joint sector ventures, with the state government holding the majority of the equity. His problems began last year, when he was eased out of the chairman's office

of Southern Agriturane (it was subsequently taken over by the state government and a case has been registered to investigate certain financial irregularities). At that time, the government had made out that the action was part of a drive against liquor-related industries, which flourished and illegally profited under MGR's rule. But many—at least those who knew Karunanidhi better—understood that this was part of a systematic strategy.

From then on, events assumed a familiar and depressing pattern for Muthiah. In March this year, he was stripped of the chairmanship of Tati-corin Alkalis and Chemicals (TAC), a Rs 55 crore company which manufactures heavy chemicals. Soon after, the government appointed home secretary R. Nagarajan as chairman of Tamil Nadu Petroproducts Ltd (TPL)—a

joint sector enterprise co-promoted by SPIC and Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corp. (TIDCO). TPL manufactures linear alkaline benzene, a raw material for the production of synthetic detergents. SPIC, therefore, was only the latest in the chain of officially-sponsored takeovers.

**T**o justify its actions, the Tamil Nadu government has advanced one common argument. It cites a 1976 central guideline, which says that joint sector companies should have government nominees as chairmen. Why should this guideline not be applied to companies promoted by Muthiah and Chidambaram, it asks.

The Muthiah camp has responded by claiming that the guideline does not





**M. Karunanidhi: plainly vindictive**

relate to companies such as SPIC, which were formed before 1976. The government has countered this by claiming that there is nothing in the guideline which suggests it cannot be applied retrospectively.

This flurry of legalistic arguments and counter-arguments leads on to some obvious questions. Why single out Muthiah? There are numerous other joint ventures in the state where private promoters are chairmen. Is the state government planning to intervene in these companies too?

The government has yet to officially answer these queries. The closest it has come to providing an explanation for its actions was when Karunanidhi responded to a question raised by a Congress(I) MLA in the state Assembly last week. Asked why his government was "unnecessarily interfering" in some joint sector projects, the chief minister said that the action against SPIC was taken because of "certain irregularities." He claimed that while the rules laid down that a private promoter's investment in joint sector companies should comprise 25 per cent of the total equity, Muthiah's holdings fell short of the requirement.

According to the government, Muthiah controls only 10.4 per cent

of SPIC's equity. And though he raised the required 25 per cent when the company was formed, more than half of this was owned by his friends and associates, who have either sold their shares or no longer support him. Says Rajendran, the new SPIC chairman: "It is not just a question about the guideline on joint ventures. They (Muthiah and Chidambaram) do not even have the required minimum (equity) to say that SPIC is a joint venture company."

This is a clever argument. It avoids both the contentious issues, the application of the guideline as well as the embarrassment of having to explain why it has not been enforced for other joint sector ventures. Moreover, by using the same argument, the state government could dislodge Muthiah himself. Says a senior state government official, "You could say that he (Muthiah) remains the company's president and vice-chairman by our courtesy."

Privately, the government is willing to advance a number of other reasons for its moves against Muthiah. For example, SPIC's financial management was very unsatisfactory. The company, in its anxiety to expand, is said to have used short-term loans to

make long-term investments amounting to Rs 25 crores. Moreover, the board meetings of Muthiah's companies were not conducted in accordance with the rules and also, some senior employees had been appointed executive directors in contravention of company law.

**T**he question is, how far will Karunanidhi and his government go. Will they allow Muthiah to remain at SPIC? Will he continue to enjoy his executive powers?

At the moment, the answer is unclear. Muthiah still clings to the hope that his powers will remain unaffected. He has chosen not to take his grievances to the press and refrained studiously—perhaps for fear of risking further retribution—from criticising the government. When SUNDAY asked him whether he would speak about the controversy on the record, he replied, "I'd rather not."

Not even after SPIC has been charged with "irregularities"? "No," he said, "I don't want to say anything at this moment."

As for the government, there is no saying what it will do next. But it is possible that some steps will be taken to curtail Muthiah's hold over SPIC. After Chidambaram's ouster, the Muthiah camp had made out that this would not affect the day-to-day functioning of the company, as the post of chairman was a non-executive one. But the new chairman, Rajendran, dismisses this claim. He told SUNDAY, "The rules don't specify that a chairman's post is purely non-executive. While it is true that the president has the executive function, the board of directors may assign any function to the chairman it wishes to." Though this may not amount to a threat, it indicates that the government is not finished with Muthiah yet.

Clearly, there is not much that Muthiah can do to stall a determined Karunanidhi. With the recent expansion of the board through the introduction of three financial institution nominees, the balance is in favour of the government.

As an industrialist who transformed SPIC in the mid-Eighties into one of the largest companies in the country, Muthiah may well earn some public sympathy. But if Karunanidhi's distaste for his association with MGR and the Congress(I) is as deep as it appears, he is going to need much more than public sympathy to fight him. Or survive. •

**Mukund Padmanabhan/Madras**

**M.M. Rajendran: SPIC's new chairman**



MUKUND PADMANABHAN



## COMPANIES

# How much longer?

*The Larsen & Toubro game just goes on*

**M**ay 11, 1990 The doomsday's deathwatch day, waiting for Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) chairman and recent Larsen & Toubro (L&T) oustee Dhirubhai Ambani to crumble under pressure. The financial institutions have taken control of L&T, the Reliance bandwagon is bereft of executive authority in the company—no matter that they still retain four nominees on the board—the government just has to pass the order curtailing Ambani-era fiscal moves, and the game is over for the fast-moving Gujarati businessman.

But the 11 May L&T board meeting, under the chairmanship of government nominee D N Ghosh, turned out to be a damp squib. There was intense speculation that the board would countermand the company's Rs 820 crore convertible debenture issue, which hit the market last year, and more importantly, stall the supplier's credit of Rs 520 crores that L&T had pledged Reliance Petrochemicals Ltd (RPL), an Ambani group company. Or, prune the debenture issue to offset the supplier's credit (L&T has already exceeded its 30 April deadline for calling in the money.)

Nothing happened. Ghosh, an ex-State Bank of India chairman and currently the Centre's key player in L&T, passed the buck. He only said that "certain decisions" which affect shareholders will be passed on to the Controller of Capital Issues (CCI) in New Delhi, and only after the CCI clears the suggestions will they be made public. Cryptic, defensive, and an indication that he was playing strictly under guidance from the Prime Minister's Office.

However, Ghosh implied that the board had discussed the working position of the company, the orders on hand and the working capital required—in effect, whether the company needs the money

from the debenture issue. While he kept mum about specific details, it was clear that the government was thinking hard about what to do with the Rs 820 crores of public money L&T had picked up. As far as the V P Singh government is concerned, killing off the RPL venture would mean killing the Ambani empire, because Dhirubhai has so much money tied up with it. In addition to the L&T supplier's credit, he garnered, Dhirubhai had picked up Rs 600 crores in an RPL debenture issue two years ago. Trying to harness L&T funds for RPL is a clear indication of just how much money he needs for the petrochemicals project.

Sources close to the non-Ambani directors on the L&T board say that the CCI is taking a fresh look at all 1989 mega-issues. The Usha Rectifier Ltd issue has already been trimmed drastically and the company has been forced to return a large chunk of the money to shareholders. On the other hand, it is not as if L&T can forego the funds. After all, the company has

legitimate expansion plans—with or without the Ambanis at the helm. Besides, passing the onus to the CCI has given rise to speculation that the Ambanis are very much in the game. The CCI could well take a lenient view of the L&T issue. Only Mukesh, Dhirubhai's older son, attended the L&T board meeting. The other Ambani stalwarts were in New Delhi doing what they do best: organising support for their survival.

Of course, this speculation would come to nothing if the Raja was just taking his destroy-Ambani game nice and slow, making Dhirubhai sweat it out as much as possible before

dealing the final blow. But this is not easy. Dhirubhai is not without his friends—yes, even in the Raja's *darbar*—and with him, nothing is impossible. Says a top Bombay corporate executive, who declines to be identified: "Each side is moving with immense deliberation and strictly according to legal provisions." They have to. The Raja cannot afford to get this one wrong. And Dhirubhai cannot afford to wait for the axe. •

*Olga Tellis/Bombay*



**Dhirubhai Ambani: staying power**

**V.P. Singh: destroying by the book**



SONDEEP SHANKAR



# Emperor of the air

*How Rajan Jetley turned Air India around*

**E**ighteen months ago, Rajan Jetley, managing director of Air India, took his family abroad on holiday. Naturally, they flew Air India. But there was a significant difference. When the Jetleys boarded the Boeing 747, a smiling steward attempted to lead them to the First Class section in the front of the aircraft. "No," said the managing director, brandishing their boarding cards. "We are in Economy." And then, as the cabin crew watched mortified, Jetley, his wife and children proceeded to make themselves comfortable in what the airline trade derisively refers to as the 'Cattle Class'.

At one level, it was a pointless gesture. There were empty seats in First Class, so no purpose was served by the managing director's voluntarily down-grading his family. But at another level, it was a move fraught with significance. The airline was then battling hundreds of its employees who were entitled to free First Class travel for themselves and their families. For eight years, the management had argued that when the First Class privilege had first been offered, Air India was a small airline, so that only a handful of employees had been entitled to it. Further, there was no Business Class in those days. So, why didn't the employees now agree to accept free Business Class travel instead?

A circular to this effect was issued by Capt D. Bose, Jetley's predecessor as managing director. But such was the outcry that it was hastily withdrawn. It took Jetley's determination and persuasion—along with the significant gesture—to make the employees see the point.

**THE BATTLE** over First Class travel may seem like a minor matter—after all, most managing directors have to renegotiate staff perquisites from time to time—but it was central to Jetley's strategy for Air India.

His approach was simple: over the years, the airline had transformed itself into an 'ethnic service', surviving on shipping the greatest number at the lowest price. Thus, Air India would concentrate on what the trade calls the 'load factor'—that is, the number of seats filled

Jetley recognised that this was a short-sighted approach. Far more important was 'yield'—a technical term for the amount an airline recovers from every seat it fills. Because Air India's flights had high load factors, the management was content. However, the seats had all been sold at heavily discounted rates, so the yield remained low—and the airline slid deeper into the red.


Jetley's strategy was to concentrate on high-yield traffic: ideally, in First and Business Class. To do this, he had to first evict Air India staff and their families from the front of the aircraft. Hence, the battle over the employees' privileges.

But there was a deeper problem. Over the last decade, morale at Air India had slipped to the level where it had become an airline run for the benefit of its staff. Unions were aggressive, cabin crew were sullen and the pilots would rush to court to block any change in the status quo. (One instance: they sued to prevent Air India from operating a non-stop Bombay-London flight on grounds of 'safety'. On hearing that at least three other airlines operated such a flight, the judge threw the case out.)

By making it clear that while he was no union-basher, he would never give in to pressure on such issues as free First Class travel, Jetley served notice that a new order had begun. At first, the unions fought him but soon, the hostility ended. And today, Air India's traditionally dismal industrial relations have improved considerably.

**FOR JETLEY**, final proof that it has all been worth it came last month. Air India declared record profits, the yield shot up and the airline ran more profitable routes than ever before.

Even the managing director's detractors, who would always find excuses for his success, are less vocal than before. It is no longer possible to ascribe Jetley's performance to a friendship with Satish Sharma, to the changing dollar-rupee ratio or to a fuel subsidy. There can be no denying that he has delivered.



**It is no longer possible to ascribe Jetley's performance to a friendship with Satish Sharma, to the changing dollar-rupee ratio or to a fuel subsidy**

Fortunately, the new National Front government has decided to let him run Air India on his own. Aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan's take-no-decision-unless-VP-says-so-in-writing policy may have had unfortunate consequences at Indian Airlines (which has no chairman, no managing director, and no board of directors), but at Air India, Jetley has simply gone on acting as though the change of government has made no difference.

His problem perhaps is that he has achieved as much as possible within the public sector. For Air India to do even better, it needs to be privatised, removed from the clutches of the bureaucrats at Sardar Patel Bhavan, and turned into a truly professional organisation.

But will any government ever show that much imagination—and courage? •





GAUTAM PATOLE



## ■ Power drive

The West Bengal government is all worked up about credit—Soviet or otherwise—for the 630 MW Bakreshwar thermal power project. It wants money, and quickly, to construct its paeen for the state's power-starved millions. So, ask comrades to donate blood to raise the cash, if the Centre won't help out. So, go to the USSR for funding, Rs 150 crores or more, because the Centre



**Jyoti Basu: power struck**

has no money to spare for Bengal. So, raise hell and make Bakreshwar a prestige issue. And forget, conveniently, that Bengal has the installed capacity to handle six times the peak demand for electricity. That if the state could get rid of "inefficiency", it wouldn't have to worry about "power". Why not clean up the state electricity board first, before asking for money? Or, why not privatise power in the state? Then Bengal wouldn't need a Bakreshwar, prestige would be intact, and for once, just once, there would be a respite from nightmarish power cuts

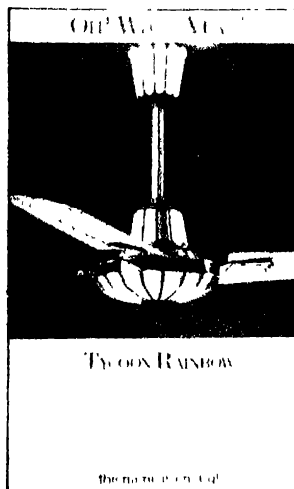
## STOCK QUOTE

**"We are all Hindus now."**

*A Bharatiya Janata Party leader, to whom Dhirubhai Ambani declared that he had always been a true Hindu*

## ■ Fandango

Only, for B.K. Khaitan, it's a solo, and dangerous dance. He has both the competition and the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) gunning for him. All thanks to recent TV ads which claim that Khaitan fans are all "100 per cent" Khaitan, implying that all components are manufactured by the company and not picked up from suppliers, put together, stamped "Khaitan" and sold to clamouring multitudes. Unfortunately for Khaitan, a consumer society—industry grapevine says it is a covert Usha move—filed



**A Khaitan fan ad: contentious**

a petition with the MRTPC saying the claim is rubbish. Government sleuths duly inspected Khaitan premises, and discovered that the

## ALLIANCE OF THE WEEK

### The Ambanis and the Hindujas



**Dhirubhai Ambani**

• It was so staggeringly obvious that we wonder why nobody worked it out earlier. Both the Ambanis and the Hindujas are in deep trouble if this government lasts its full term. Consequently, both must ensure that it



**Srichand Hinduja**

collapses within the next 18 months. The two sides have pooled resources. They already share such friends as Bal Thackeray and A.B. Vajpayee (and of course, Satish Sharma) and they have the same lawyers. Moreover, the Hindujas can't come to India to keep tabs on Bofors. So, the Ambanis do it for them. Over the last fortnight, Reliance's new, plumply ineffectual PR manager has been on the phone to journalists in Bombay and Geneva in the hope of spreading dissension among the investigators. Will it work? Who knows? With Dhirubhai Ambani, anything is possible.

company doesn't even have installed capacity, and was purchasing everything from suppliers. Last week, the agency slapped on an injunction restraining Khaitan from putting out false claims. With the competition eagle-eyed, and with the MRTPC cottoning on to him, the fan king will have to watch it

## ■ Merge!

Here they go again. Merging abroad to set off speculation at home. The proposed merger of Lotus Development Corp. and Novell Inc., US software and networking giants, has got Indian companies Zenith Computers Ltd and Hinditron Computers thinking. They both market Novell software, and their competition, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) handles Lotus packages. The three Indian companies are a little nervous about their principals' merger moves, as it would directly affect their tie-ups and marketing strategies. Novell executives were in India last week to soothe flustered nerves, assuring Zenith and Hinditron that nothing would change. TCS officials were also trying to appear calm about it, calling it a "marriage of convenience". But it's not quite that simple. It isn't quite like the Unilever buyouts, which led to Hindustan Lever drawing to its fold Brooke Bond, Lipton and Ponds Ltd in India. Zenith, Hinditron and TCS are independent operations. To survive their software dreams, they will have to figure a way out with marketing strategies, or they could end up eating each other.



# Business Minus

*A new video cassette fails to maximise its assets*

**T**he idea seems irresistible. If *Newstrack* is *India Today* on video and *Starbuzz* is *Stardust* on cassette, then why not try the same thing with *Business India*? As Ashok Advani himself seems to have no ambitions in that direction, it has been left to Amit Khanna, the Bombay film industry's Renaissance man, to come up with *Business Plus*. (Just as Surrender Bhatia and Prochi Badshah, two former employees of Nari Hira's media empire, devised *Starbuzz* when Hira decided not to put *Stardust* on tape.)

The concept behind *Business Plus* is to make the world of business come alive. Commercially, this makes sense because the target audience of affluent executives and businessmen comprises precisely the kind of people that advertisers are looking for. Moreover, because of astute marketing, Khanna has been able to ensure that the cassette reaches all those he calls decision-makers.

So far so good. But now for the problems.

The trouble with *Business Plus* is that whoever scripted and edited the first issue forgot to bother to learn why *Newstrack* is so successful. The key to *Newstrack*'s hold over the market is that it concentrates on action: it shows people being beaten up in Meham, militants burning the Indian flag in Kashmir, Shashi Kapoor shooting for *Ajooba* and V P Singh working the crowds in rural UP. Secondly, it takes famous people and puts them on the spot on camera. Vijay Amritraj on how much he earns, V P. Singh on whether he will ever accept the prime ministership ("never" is the reply), Rahul Bajaj on how Indian Airlines is not a national disgrace, and Kalpnath Rai on why Rajiv Gandhi is "just like diamond".

*Business Plus* fails miserably on both counts. Its lead story on the Union budget has urbane anchor-man Arvind Sethi on camera for much longer than it should. Sethi proceeds to tell us about the budget, cutting now and then to a gaggle of tiresome economists and *chamcha*-like industrialists who hold forth on the characteristics of the budget. Ideally, Sethi's talking-head routine should have been

restricted to the initial spiel and then, to the links. Graphics (and *Business Plus*' are particularly bad) should have told the story along with incisive interviews with those who matter: Madhu Dandavate, Bimal Jalan, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Nitin Desai for the government, and some heavyweight critics on the other side: S B Chavan, Pranab Mukherjee, Nani Palkhivala, etc.

Instead, *Business Plus* has strained interviews with the likes of Freddie Mehta and Raunaq Singh, all of whom seem to be suffering from rabbit-in-the-headlights syndrome. (This is what terrified interviewees seem like

interplay with his interviewer. (Perhaps, Piramal's questions were shot afterwards.) Tavleen Singh attempts to find out if the Prime Minister has a kitchen Cabinet. She asks Khushwant Singh, who spends a long time saying that he doesn't know. D.P. Tripathi, who is so blinded by the video crew's lights that he comes across like Stevie Wonder, and Santosh Bharatiya, who delivers a party political broadcast ("V P Singh understands India. Its people. Its problems. He has no need of advisers.") Only Arun Shourie makes any sense.

It is only when Tavleen Singh gives



**Rahul Bajaj:** comes off as a platitudinous bore



**Arun Shourie:** the only one who makes sense



**George Fernandes:** gives great quotes



on camera when bright lights are shone in their eyes, microphones thrust in their faces and stiff, awkward questions posed by inexperienced interviewers.)

Other segments are dull. Gita Piramal tries to make Rahul Bajaj come to life with little success. While Bajaj refrains from doing his notorious Daboo Kapoor impersonation (a great hit on last year's *Newstrack*), he comes off as a platitudinous bore trapped behind his desk who has little

Ramesh Vangal and Ramesh Chauhan a chance to square off over the Pepsi-Thums Up battle that *Business Plus* comes to life. The segment is tightly edited, full of action and expertly compered by Tavleen, who manages to get great quotes from George Fernandes.

That perhaps is the way ahead for *Business Plus*. It needs more action, better interviews and punchier editing. It needs also to give such bores as Bajaj a miss and concentrate on more colourful businessmen: Russi Mody, Dhirubhai Ambani, Vijay Malviya or Manu Chhabria, for example.

It has many assets. Tavleen knows her way around Delhi and is good on camera. Piramal's knowledge of the business world is unmatched. And Sethi could be a real find if he is properly handled. Plus, the business video slot is still wide open.

A little fine tuning and Amit Khanna could have a hit on his hands. ●  
**Vijay Sahni**



# Girding his loins

*V.P. Singh decides to increase defence spending as the country's foreign policy goes awry under Gujral*



No, the spectacle of V.P. Singh girding his loins does not present a pretty picture. War solves nothing. It has taken us a quarter of a century to recover from military defeat (1962), a

military draw (1965) and military victory (1971). Whatever the outcome, the people suffer, the economy suffers, the country suffers. If war is imposed on us, there is, of course, no option but to fight back. But it takes a minority leader of a minority party heading a minority government to go around the country advertising his plans of throwing the nation to the dogs of war—for no more edifying a reason, it would seem, than to save his personal political destiny.

The story goes back a bit. The National Front's (NF) election manifesto poured scorn on our defence spending. They claimed, they knew how to better safeguard the country's security—and at less expense at that. The armed forces were, thus, put on notice that the NF thought their weapons to be toys, their ranks to be bloated, and their privileges excessive. They were further told that their arms had been procured not to fit them for the battlefield but to fill the coffers of the ruling party—*pace* Bofors.

The elections over, the first President's address darkly hinted at defence cuts round the corner, while the so-called "White Paper" commissioned by the new government from the Economic Advisory Council unambiguously identified defence as the key sector from which resources were to be diverted to solve the twin problems of the budgetary deficit and the balance-of-payments gap.

The promise of defence cuts—like all NF promises—has, of course, been broken. Provision for defence spending in the first NF budget has soared above Rs 15,000 crores, confirming, as

nothing else can, both the naivety of the NF's policy assumptions as well as the empty euphoria of their expectations.

The NF's plans of reducing the nation's defence burden were based on the belief that diplomacy could so radically alter our security environment, especially in the environs of South Asia, that defence spending could be contained and the country led to new vistas of peace and prosperity.

**S**o, Gujral went on record—in the week before Kashmir blew up—that India would "never again" deploy

its armed forces outside our territory. The indelicacy of such a statement apart, what, one wonders, gave Gujral the mandate to bind himself, his government and, indeed, the country to such a course for all time to come? Delusions of grandeur, doubtless. For how else is one to explain oracular pronouncements of this kind from the foreign minister of a government which, at the best of times, represents no one but its minority self and, much of the time, not even all of itself, but merely one of some of its factions. And which, in any case, espouses at all times not its own policy prescriptions but whatever is dictated to it by

**V.P. Singh:** *It takes a minority leader of a minority party, heading a minority government, to go around the country advertising his plans of throwing the nation to the dogs of war to save his personal political destiny*





whichever of its "outside supporters" happens, at the time, to be occupying the dominant position?

While, of course, the people at large wait for answers to those larger questions, the armed forces are left wondering what they did wrong that has earned them the opprobrium of the foreign minister with whom they are now so sadly saddled. The lightning speed with which all three branches of our armed forces—the army, the air force, and the navy—responded to Maldives President Gayoom's pressing plea for assistance to foil a mercenary-mounted *coup d'état* had quite taken the world's breath away. And instead of praising them for their outstanding performance, here we have a foreign minister who, immediately on returning from the Maldives, announces "Never again!"

Next, Sri Lanka. The IPKF went into Sri Lanka not as an invading army nor as a mercenary force, but at the express request of President Jayewardene. Its role in the island was linked to the implementation of the agreement signed between India and Sri Lanka on 29 July, 1987. When, after the change of government in Sri Lanka, Premadasa started renegeing on the accord, prolonged negotiations were held with the Sri Lanka authorities to link the IPKF's withdrawal with the two issues which, by then, had become the most important for the Tamils in Sri Lanka: genuine devolution of power to the North-East Provincial Council, and the assured safety and security of the Tamil population. This was set out in the Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Communique of 18 September, 1989.

Until the advent of the NF government, it was abundantly clear to the Sri Lankans that there was a nexus between our agreement to withdraw and their agreement to devolve and protect. The NF's posturing put an end to that nexus. To show Premadasa that they were not like the Congress, the NF threw Tamil interests—and the IPKF's reputation—to the winds and accepted a deadline for the "de-induction" of our forces without insisting on a deadline for the fulfilment of the Sri Lankan government's obligations.

Thus, the Sri Lankans painted us into a corner where they secured the IPKF's pull-out without devolving anything to the North-East Provincial Council and—worse, much worse—



**The IPKF in Sri Lanka:** They were quite simply scuttled. Not by the Sri Lankans. Not by the LTTE. But by the National Front.

putting the safety of the Tamils entirely at the mercy of the Sri Lankan security forces, on the one hand, and Prabhakaran's Tigers, on the other.

In a word, the IPKF was quite simply scuttled. Not by the Sri Lankans. Not by the LTTE. But by the National Front.

**O**ddly enough, considering the damage it would do to the morale of our armed forces, the National Front representative who led Operation Scuttle was neither the Prime Minister nor the foreign minister nor any other minister of the central government. It was Dr Kalaignar ("Great Artist") Karunanidhi. The NF has carried their nonsense about "genuine federalism" to the point where foreign policy has apparently been transferred to the state list. So, all the shots on the IPKF and Sri Lanka were called not by the NF government at the Centre but by its regional satrap, the DMK chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

The blood of the Indian *jawan* has mingled with the sands of Sri Lanka. It is blood spilt in a national cause. A regional chauvinist like Karunanidhi can hardly be expected to understand what "national" means.

If General A S Kalkat's letter to the Prime Minister—measured, restrained, dignified—conveys anything at all, it is our armed forces' haunting sense of humiliation at having been let down so badly by the government and party that now finds themselves in power. It is this army—denigrated, deprived and insulted as never before in our history—whom V P Singh and his cohorts now plan to field against Pakistan.

Why at all is there talk of war in the air? Not because there is a *casus belli*

Not because it is a solution to either Kashmir or Punjab. Not because the subcontinental or international situation warrants it. But only because of Inder Gujral's diplomatic ineptitude and V P Singh's politics of "managing contradictions".

Let us take each in turn.

**F**irst, Gujral. Our present problems with Pakistan stem in good measure from Gujral's puffed-up pride at being something of an Urdu poetaster. In which capacity he had headed some years ago on committee which submitted a report (a rather good report, one might add) on the status of Urdu in India. Now, showing off one's Urdu at a *mehfil* is, of course, all very well—and to be encouraged. But substituting *shari* for diplomacy is what gets us into trouble. Yet that is what happened at the precise moment when the NF government faced its first major diplomatic crisis.

The Pak foreign minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan—the urbane scion of the house of Rampur—was invited by Gujral to visit India. Full marks to Gujral for that. A date for the visit was fixed— at "mutual convenience", as we diplomatists say (i.e. a date when Gujral was not required to preside at a *mushara* and Yaqub could take time off from pumping the Afghan mujahideen full of arms!).

Now, it was no fault of either our Urdu don nor of the Rampur aristocrat that the BJP picked the eve of the visit as the date to pressure the Prime Minister into sending Jagmohan to Kashmir. Jagmohan went there. Kashmir blew up. And Benazir picked up the script her father had stopped reciting in Shimla, to launch a verbal attack on India more vicious than



anything heard since 1971

Instead of gauging that this was the moment to firmly tell the Pakistanis where they got off—especially as the whole world knows that Yaqub was imposed on Benazir by the Pak Army and the Pak President as the price for letting her be sworn in as Prime Minister—Gujral could not resist his longed-for opportunity to play the gracious host to the Man-Who-Came-To-Dinner. A banquet was laid on (with, one hopes, the best of Rampuri delicacies on display—for the famed chefs of Rampur have made eating a form of gastronomic worship). And the entire Pakistan division of the ministry of external affairs was asked to rummage through anthologies of Urdu poetry to discover a suitable quatrain for Gujral to serve up to Yaqub as the sweetest of desserts in his after-dinner speech.

Yaqub, on the other hand, is a pure professional. First, he persuaded Gujral to confine his protests to the seclusion of South Block. Second, he got him to refrain from any public riposte to Benazir's outrageous statement. Third, having hoodwinked Gujral out of a meaningful joint Communique, he planned to issue his own Press Release through his high commission in New Delhi before returning to Islamabad. But, meanwhile, there was the little matter of replying to Gujral's toast at the banquet.

Yaqub, having taken the measure of the man, knew that—inevitably—Gujral would polish off an Urdu oration with a verse from Faiz which, to a round of dutiful "wah! wah!" from the assembled guests (all chums-turned-*chamchas* from his India International Centre days) would drive the Pak army from our borders and Yaqub right into our arms.

Gujral spoke. In Urdu. Out came Faiz. Out came cries of "Mashallah". And Gujral sat down, beaming like a billy-goat at a banquet, thrilled with his performance as chairman of the Urdu Committee.

Yaqub rose. Gravely he told his audience that, as the matter at hand was serious, he would speak in English! Extempore. Except that three-



**I.K. Gujral (right) with Yaqub Khan:** *Because our foreign minister wants to recite poetry, we go in for good neighbourliness with Pakistan. And hardly has he got through the first stanza when the BJP says, "Let's go to war"—and the PM dutifully obliges.*

quarters of the way down his speech, he surreptitiously pulled a piece of paper from out of his pocket on which was inscribed the briefest of Urdu couplets. From Faiz, who else? And delivered it with the practised insouciance of generations of Rampuri *nawabzadas* (to which, Gujral Sahab, a couple of years at Government College, Lahore is no match). Using the legendary beauty of Zuleikha as the paradigm of the dove of peace, the Sahibzada told Gujral:

*Taakat-e-deed e-Zuleikha  
Na tuhe na mujhe*

The power to gaze on Zuleikha  
Is neither in you  
Nor in me!

Nothing could have been a clearer signal of Pak assessments or Pak intentions, neither, Yaqub said in effect, can my minority government contemplate peace—nor, for that matter, can yours! Yet, Gujral, pleased as punch at this 1990 demonstration of *Shikwa* and *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (cf. Allama Iqbal's renowned *Complaint* and *Reply To Complaint*) applauded with wild enthusiasm and looked around him with undisguised satisfaction. Ever since then, Yaqub has been running circles around Gujral, the latest having been in New York—where, once again, Yaqub

showed a seams-stress' ability to stitch up Gujral's lips while himself collecting all the headlines.

What a contrast to 1987 when a single phone call from Rajiv Gandhi to Zia-ul-Haq put the leash on the dogs of war—and brought Zia post-haste to Delhi to talk peace! The Pakistani reaction to Operation Brasstacks and the skirmishes around the Siachen Glacier were much more serious challenges to national security and peace in our region than the events of the last few weeks. Yet, because of the former Prime Minister's non-nonsense diplomacy and personal standing in the international community, the situation was quickly defused and the parties were back to jaw-jaw, not war-war.

Now, alas, we have a Prime Minister who thinks diplomacy is for domestic

survival. Which brings me to my second point: the PM's 'politics of managing contradictions'.

Because Gujral wants to recite poetry, we go in for good neighbourliness. And hardly has he got through the first stanza when the BJP says, 'Let's go to war'—and the PM dutifully obliges.

With everything going awry, with the BJP putting the blame on him for all that is going wrong (and taking the credit for the little that is going right), with the CPI(M) getting restive at its self-imposed role as the handmaiden of majority communalism, and Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar readying themselves for the take-over, V.P. Singh is coming to believe that only war—or the insanity of a nuclear bomb—constitutes his last hope of political survival.

It has now become a race between the survival of the NF government and the survival of the nation. And where, in this gathering darkness, do we turn to for comfort? To the immortal Faiz, of course.

*Chand roz aur, meri jan  
Faqat chand hi roz!*

Just a few days more, my love  
Just a few days more! ●

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.



# Desperately seeking Gorbachev

*You can't cure Kashmir or Punjab, if you don't know what the illness is*

**T**here is a long and glorious tradition of being bipartisan in foreign policy matters. It is only on domestic policy that we disagree. So it has been with Kashmir.

Whether you ask Rajiv Gandhi or V P Singh, the BJP or the CPI(M), they all advance the same explanation for the Kashmir problem. It is Pakistan's fault. If the Pakistanis hadn't trained and armed the militants, if they hadn't send money to the JKLF and if their regular soldiers hadn't donned mufti and masqueraded as Kashmiri freedom fighters, things would be all right today.

But once the flag-waving and the jingoism are done with, the bipartisan approach disappears. Then, everybody has his own solutions to the problem. Broadly speaking, there are four positions.

## ■ The Jagmohan line:

The demands of the Kashmiris are unreasonable. One cannot negotiate with people who refuse to recognise the authority of the Indian state. And anyway, the Kashmiris are not worse off than, say, the people of Orissa. So why should they get a better deal just because they've taken to arms?

## ■ The George Fernandes stand:

Kashmir is the cornerstone of our secularism. By including a Muslim majority state in India, we proved that the two-nation theory was bunk. If we let go of it now, then it will suggest that a partition on religious lines made sense.

Yes, the Kashmiris are being unreasonable by threatening to secede, but they don't really mean it. They have genuine economic grievances and get a bad deal. Because of the special status afforded to Kashmir when it acceded to India, it is inevitable that the disillusionment will be expressed in terms of 'azaadi'. However, if you negotiate with them and send lots of money, they can be won back.

## ■ The 'western liberal' position:

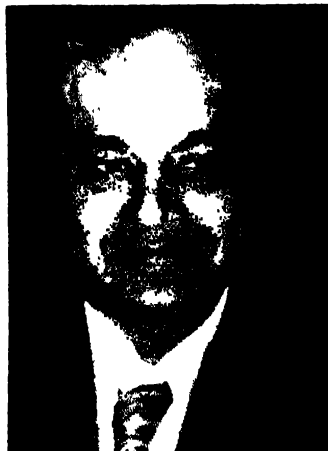
India has no real right to Kashmir. A Hindu maharaja decided to bring his Muslim population over. We do not allow the Muslim Nizam of Hyderabad to accede to Pakistan because he had a Hindu population. So, how could we justify the accession of Kashmir?

We refused to grant the Kashmiris a UN-supervised plebiscite, arguing that the Muslim Prime Minister of Kashmir

## What caused the Kashmir problem?



Rajiv Gandhi seems to think that Governor Jagmohan is the problem



Jagmohan says that it was Farooq Abdullah's mistake



George Fernandes suggests that perhaps India did not pay enough attention to Kashmir

■ **The Rajiv Gandhi position:** The Kashmiris have some genuine demands but by taking to violence have ruined their own case. We must restore law and order to the state and having done that, sit across the table with the Kashmiris and make them responsible for their own destiny—within India. (This is essentially what Rajiv tried to do with Punjab when he was Prime Minister.)

had chosen India. Further, we said, there were regular elections in the valley. But, in fact, shortly after taking this stand, we locked up Sheikh Abdullah and everybody knows that elections were routinely rigged.

At a time when the whole world is opting for self-determination, how can we hope to hang on to Kashmir by force when the Kashmiris, almost to the last man, wish to have nothing to do with India?



**A**ll four positions have their strengths and their weaknesses. Jagmohan is right. When somebody insists on seceding, there is no basis for negotiation. On the other hand, the reign of terror unleashed by the security forces has only succeeded in ensuring that even moderate Kashmiris turn anti-Indian.

Fernandes' approach has the advantage of keeping the political process alive and of telling the Kashmiris that India is receptive to their problems. But is it advisable to keep regarding Kashmir as a special case or even, as the bedrock of our secularism? Why should Kashmir continue to get a better deal 40 years after Partition? And even if it did secede, how would this adversely affect Indian Muslims?

Rajiv Gandhi's line seems the most reasonable—in fact, it seems too good to be true. Can you really combine Jagmohan and Fernandes' approaches? Rajiv believes that the 'bad guys' should get the stick while the moderates get the lollipops. But when he tried this approach in Punjab, he found that any moderate he talked to soon lost credibility. People tended to gather round such 'bad guys' as Simranjeet Singh Maan (Now that V.P. Singh regards him as a moderate, Maan too has lost his credibility.)

The 'western liberal' position has a certain plausibility, but it does not tell the full story. Yes, India did lock up Sheikh Abdullah, but he did emerge from jail seemingly bearing no ill-will towards the state that incarcerated him. Then, he became chief minister of Kashmir and cheerfully asserted his loyalty to the Indian Union. As for the average Kashmiri, if he had never really wanted to be part of India, then why in 1965, when Pakistan sent in infiltrators, did the people of Kashmir refuse to rise up and throw out the Indians? Instead, the Kashmiris nabbed the infiltrators and handed them in to the nearest police station.

**O**ne reason why all 'solutions' to the Kashmir problem fail to add up could be that nobody seems to know what caused the problem. Jagmohan says that it was Farooq Abdullah's mistake. Fernandes suggests that perhaps India did not pay enough attention to Kashmir. Rajiv seems to think Jagmohan is the problem. In the West, they believe that the Kashmiris were worried by the prospect of being ruled by a regime that was backed by the Hindu fundamentalists of the BJP. And so on.

## The new political culture of regionalism



Bus passengers struck down by terrorists' bullets in Punjab

None of this makes much sense. Many states—Bihar, for instance—have had chief ministers who were far more incompetent than Farooq. And why on earth should the Centre pay special attention to one state over the others? Moreover, it is a mistake to believe that Kashmir exploded only after this government took over or after Jagmohan was appointed. The media discovered the problem fairly recently, but it was already there last year.

In the final analysis, all region-specific explanations for the current agitation in Kashmir fail to tell the full story. Yes, of course, there's corruption, of course, there's unemployment, but in the Indian context, is this unusual enough to lead a full-scale insurrection?

If all this sounds vaguely familiar, it is because six or seven years ago, we were faced with the same dilemma over Punjab. As far as most Indians (especially Hindus) were concerned, the Sikhs were not outsiders, but an integral part of the Indian mosaic. Aggressive, prosperous and proud, nobody could conceive of them as second class citizens. Yes, Sikhism was a different religion, but rare was the Hindu who regarded it as radically different from his own faith. While Islam and Christianity were clearly quite distinct from Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism were all grouped together as being off-shoots of Hinduism.

Moreover, nobody could conceive of Punjab as being a backward area. The common perception was that the major gains of the Green Revolution

had been felt in the state and that the Sikhs (and Hindu Punjabis) were far better off than most Indians.

So, when the Akali Dal—a mainstream political party comprising the likes of H.S. Longowal and P.S. Badal—made demands that, by the standards of Indian politics, were extraordinary, there was widespread outrage. Whenever moderate Sikhs began to demonstrate a sneaking respect for J.S. Bhindranwale—who was, in Khushwant Singh's phrase, "a mad monk"—nobody could understand it.

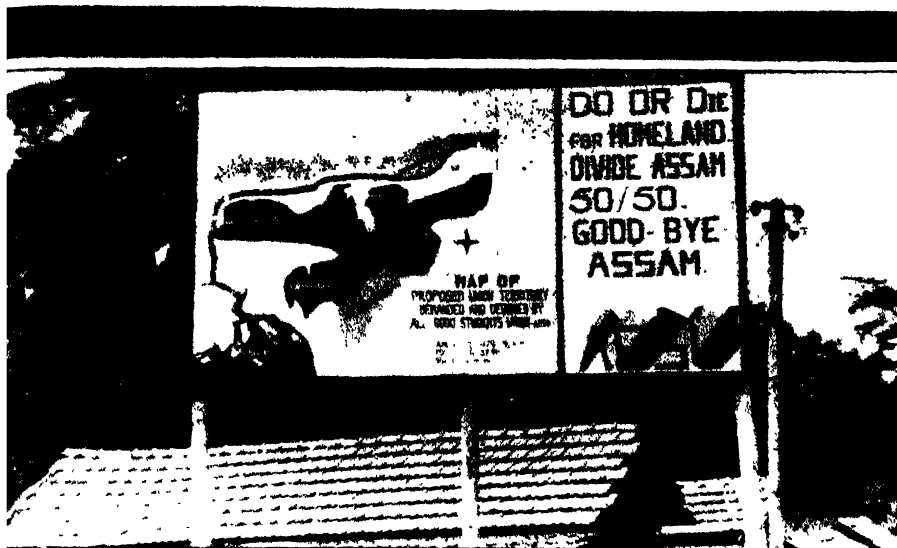
It was a situation analogous to the one we find ourselves in these days in Kashmir, in the sense that nobody had the solution because nobody was really sure what had caused the problem.

**I**f the Punjab problem confused the rest of India, what about Assam? First, there was a student-led agitation over the preponderance of 'foreigners' on the electoral rolls. When that seemed to be settled, the Bodos decided they wanted a homeland of their own and took to arms. More or less simultaneously, an old-style Marxist outfit called the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) also decided to blow up trains and assassinate prominent persons.

Because Assam is far from Delhi, its problems have not hit the national media. Yet, in many ways, the mess in Assam is greater than the one in Punjab. Settle with one group of terrorists/militants/agitators and another springs up at once.

And while the Kashmir and Punjab problems can be seen in religious terms, what about Assam? The mili-





A map of the proposed 'Bodoland' on a hoarding in Assam

tants there do not belong to some insecure religious minority that has taken to arms in an effort to assert its identity in the face of a Hindu onslaught

Once again, the same explanations are trotted out. There is a lot of unemployment. The government is corrupt. Prafulla Mahanta is fighting with Bhri-gu Phukan, so there is no effective administration, etc., etc.

And once again, region-specific explanations do not really make much sense. So, nobody finds the solution because nobody is really sure what the problem is.

**A**ll this leads inexorably to one conclusion, the region-specific approach will not work. There is no meaningful sense in which the people of Kashmir, Punjab and Assam are worse off than, say, the people of Bihar, Orissa and Rajasthan. To pretend that by doing deals with militants you can assuage the sense of grievance is foolish. It is equally silly to imagine that by throwing money at the problem, you can make it go away.

The roots of the crisis do not lie in Srinagar, Amritsar or Guwahati; they lie in New Delhi.

There is now a widespread perception that the present political system has failed to deliver. The idealism that accompanied the birth of the independent Indian state in 1947 is dying, if it is not already dead. Nobody talks of 'nation-building' any longer, the concern now is with material rewards. Patriotism in the Nehruvian sense has been forgotten; in its place we have a sabre-rattling jingoism. National in-

tegration and secularism have become tired, old political clichés; communalism through such code phrases as 'minorityism' and 'Hindu resurgence' has become respectable.

Most people are now more cynical about politicians than they have ever been. The dramatic swings at elections suggest that the country is expressing its anger against its leaders in the only way it can. The disillusionment is not directed at any one political party, but at the lot, just as the incumbent Congress governments were unseated in the north, so were the incumbent Opposition governments in the south.

**W**hat does all this have to do with Assam, Punjab and Kashmir?

Everything.

When a system is perceived to be failing, people look for alternatives. Frequently, they turn to the religious and regional loyalties that preceded the emergence of the system.

This is what is happening in India today.

The danger with regionalism is that it means that the relationship between New Delhi and the state capitals becomes an adversarial one. In the present political system New Delhi calls the shots. The states must fight the Centre to get what they want.

The disillusionment, the lack of faith in the system, the sense of alienation from New Delhi and the new political culture of regionalism are responsible for the violence we are witnessing throughout the country. In the south, this has meant the rejection of cow-belt parties (the Janata Dal

and the BJP) in favour of ideally regional alternatives or failing that, the Congress(I) which is at least perceived as being more than a Hindi-belt outfit.

In other states, the disillusionment with the system has found a violent expression. At present, it is just Kashmir, Punjab and Assam. But the experience of the last decade suggests that the trend of violence is spreading. None of the states that witnessed violent agitation in 1982 (Assam, for instance) is much better off today. And new states (Kashmir, for example) are being added to the list.

**T**he danger with region-specific solutions is that they boil down to one of two options: the carrot or the stick. Both will not work. To grant a larger share of the cake to those who resort to violence, will only encourage others to do so. And a hardline will merely increase the alienation.

If there is a solution, it has to consist of a complete overhaul of a political system that has fallen into disrepute. Two aspects of this overhaul are crucial.

- We must dump the socialism that has made India the sick man of Asia. It was a brave idea in 1947, but it hasn't worked. Until the system begins paying out economic dividends, it will never recover its standing in the eyes of the people. Besides, much of the politico-bureaucratic corruption emerges directly from the structure of controls.

- New Delhi must shed its powers. Excessive centralisation has led to many of our problems. We need a much looser federation of states to ensure that all disillusionment is not expressed in region vs Centre terms. (Rajiv Gandhi believes this is not enough. We need to decentralise further with the Panchayati Raj. It is an interesting if controversial view.)

In the international context, this is not a particularly startling prescription. In the Indian context, however, it is still heresy. Moreover, it needs a leader with vision and strength to implement it. V P Singh's is clearly an interim government which lacks the power to make radical changes. And Rajiv Gandhi, who had the opportunity, in 1985, flunked it.

But, until India finds its Gorbachev, things will not get better in Kashmir, Punjab or indeed anywhere else.

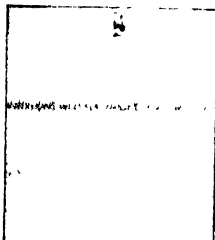
In fact, they could get a lot worse. •

**Vir Sanghvi**



# Stage talk

*Contemporary Indian theatre analysed  
threadbare*



The homogeneity of our theatre is at best, nominal, at worst, illusory. And publications such as *Contemporary Indian Theatre*

go a long way towards fostering that illusion. Comprising 19 interviews with leading theatre personalities—including Utpal Dutt, Habib Tanvir and Ratan Thiyam—the volume also contains brief studies of seven other stalwarts, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar among them. One can cavil at the disproportionate representation (as many as six of the interviewees are from the Hindi theatre scene) but the photographs and detailed lists of productions make the book a worthwhile buy.

The volume makes interesting reading as it constitutes what researchers call 'primary source material'. For instance, did you know that there are autobiographical touches to Girish Karnad's *Yayati*? Shyamanand Jalan's interview gives an insider's view of Mohan Rakesh at rehearsal, and of Sombhu Mitra's inability to cope with the title role in *Tughlaq*. Jabbar Patel

talks about the court judgement on his controversial play, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, which decreed that every performance begin with the disclaimer that Nana Phadnavis was, in fact, a hero.

Something that unites all interviewees is their concern with their "sociological impact". Habib Tanvir believes in political commitment and Kumar Roy says that "no play is worth producing unless it has social relevance". G P. Deshpande's interest in "what is happening to the Marxist movement in this country" leads him to make the rather self-important claim that "my plays (in Marathi) are the first in Indian drama that present the ruling-class politician realistically". As one proceeds southwards, politics seems to become secondary. K N Panikkar, for instance, categorically denies any political motivation whatsoever.

The recent integration of many folk and traditional elements into urban theatre is discussed in conversation with several practitioners of this style, including Girish Karnad (*Hayavadana*), Chandrasekhar Kambar (*Jokumaraswami*) and Habib Tanvir (Chhattisgarhi theatre). Mahesh Elkunchwar argues, however, that "urban folk theatre has become a kind of artistic

kleptomania", borrowing colourful forms for superficial decorative effect. Ratan Thiyam prefers to call his Manipuri plays ritualistic expressions of his personal vision, but feels that nobody in Indian theatre can match Peter Brook or Eugenio Barba as far as experimentation is concerned.

Acting techniques are discussed threadbare. Theatre and cinema star Shreeram Lagoo elaborates on the importance he attaches to physical training. Director Vijaya Mehta, who regards herself as an ensemble worker, notes how each action on stage "has to be pinned down and examined... the actor has to concentrate on it moment by moment". She follows the "biographical approach" to acting, analysing the character's entire life with the actor, eventually achieving an "iceberg effect where only a minuscule portion is shown and the bulk of it is felt". B V Karanth, too, believes that a play's success depends on the actor—not the director—and on the creation of an appropriate theatrical language.

Elkunchwar makes the most thoughtful observations about playwriting. Indians, he maintains, give the written word too much heed, the ultimate theatrical truth is the performer's soul. Kumar Roy recommends that, for the present search for roots to be successful, "Tagore certainly provides a much better starting point". Says Roy: "Rabindranath has not been as seriously studied by directors and producers as his stature demands."

The interviews with Dharamvir Bharati and Satyadev Dubey are relatively dissatisfying. The former's consistently elevated tone may strike the reader as mere pomposity. Dubey's written replies to his questionnaire vary from the indefensible—rating *Andha Yug* as "the only thing that matches Shakespeare and the famous Greeks" or finding "very poignant comparisons" between Aswatthama and Sikh terrorists—to such immodest declarations as "I am the greatest", "I am the big league" or "I may yet become the most important playwright in India since Tendulkar and Karnad". And when he observes that the attraction of women drew him to theatre or that he regrets "the missed opportunities with women", he is neither insightful nor humorous.

But such aberrations notwithstanding, this is a worthwhile book for the theatre enthusiast and a treasure-trove for the research scholar. •

Ananda Lal

Scene from *Wada Chirebandi* directed by Vijaya Mehta: 'biographical approach to acting'





DURGAPRASAD



**Dimple Kapadia: while the sun shines**

**G**uess where Dimple Kapadia spent all her time while shooting at Film City, recently? Inside Hema Malini's dressing room.

It was, obviously, a sunny day, or why else would the Deol women (if only by default) be so warm towards one another?

**W**hen history repeats itself, it's a *menage a trois*. At least that's true of the Salim Khan (the bitter half of the Salim-Javed team) family, anyway.

Now that papa Salim has got his love life in order, with wives Salma and Helen going off on shopping sprees together when they're not regaling Channel Four viewers with what they like best in their man, *beta* Salman is keeping the agonized lover slot occupied.

To begin at the beginning is to go back to Salman's first love Shaheen. The two went steady for years on end, with Shaheen becoming an integral part of the Khan household. Marriage was on the cards, when a Binju-less Sangeeta Birlani appeared on the scene. Salman was

attracted to the sexy Bijli; resisted her charms manfully for a while and then succumbed. The Salman-Sangeeta affair was on. Shaheen, bowing to the inevitable, made a quick exit from the scene.

Then came *Maine Pyar Kiya* and mega-success for Khan. And with it came thoughts of marriage (yes, again!) Sangeeta wasn't too keen, Salman, she thought, should wait until he was a little more secure (i.e. had a little more money). Unable to bear this rejection, Khan flew off to Hong Kong and Shaheen, who proved slightly more amenable.

Back in Bombay, Sangeeta was spewing fire. And Salman hurriedly executed a turnabout, saying he loved her and only her. But then he pulled the same line with Shaheen (By now, we hope you're as confused as we are.)

Neither of the pretty young things were taken in, and issued an ultimatum to the new heart-throb of film-

dom: "It's either one of us or none at all." All of which has left Salman rueing the fact that he doesn't have accommodating girlfriends, or even, papa's luck.

**P**erhaps this wasn't quite what he had in mind when he asked for a re-play of the "good old days." But Rajesh Khanna got saddled with old flame Anju Mahendru, anyway.



**Anju Mahendru and (inset) Rajesh Khanna: the bad old days**



DURGAPRASAD

**Salman and (inset) Sangeeta: on-and-off affair**



DURGAPRASAD



SANTOSH GHOSH

And true to her forthright self, she confronted Anju with her suspicions. "Don't be silly," countered Mahendru, "Jats and I don't sleep together."

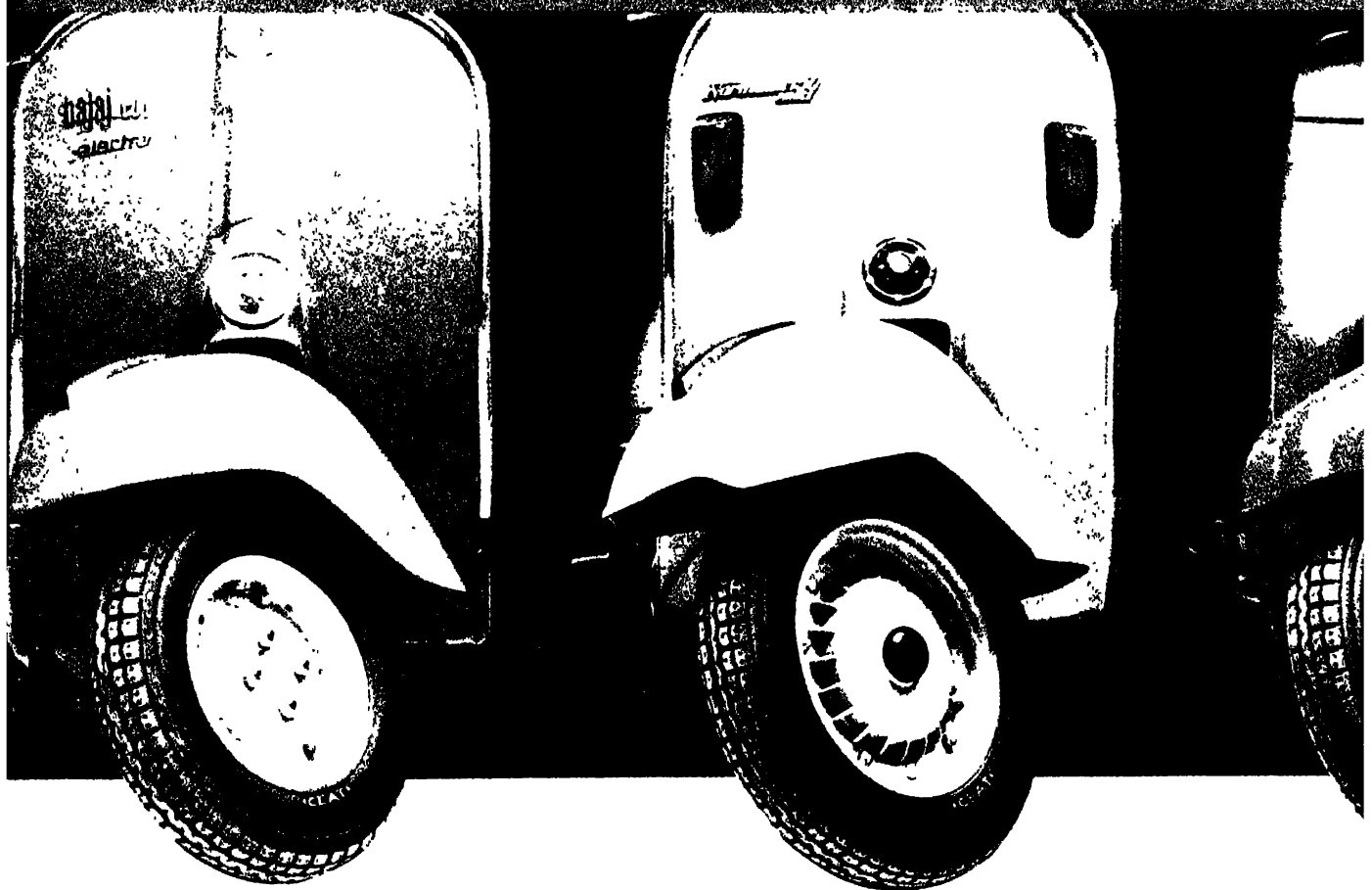
**F**our years after they first began going around, Ramesh Sippy (the director not the distributor) has decided to make an honest woman of Kiran Joneja. Or so Kiran Joneja believes.

The lady has, of late, developed an unfortunate propensity to confide her wedding plans in unsuspecting bystanders. "We are finally getting married," she simpers coyly. "It will be by the end of this year, or by mid-next year. Nothing, but nothing can change things now."

We hope, for Kiran's sake, that she's got it right this time. ●



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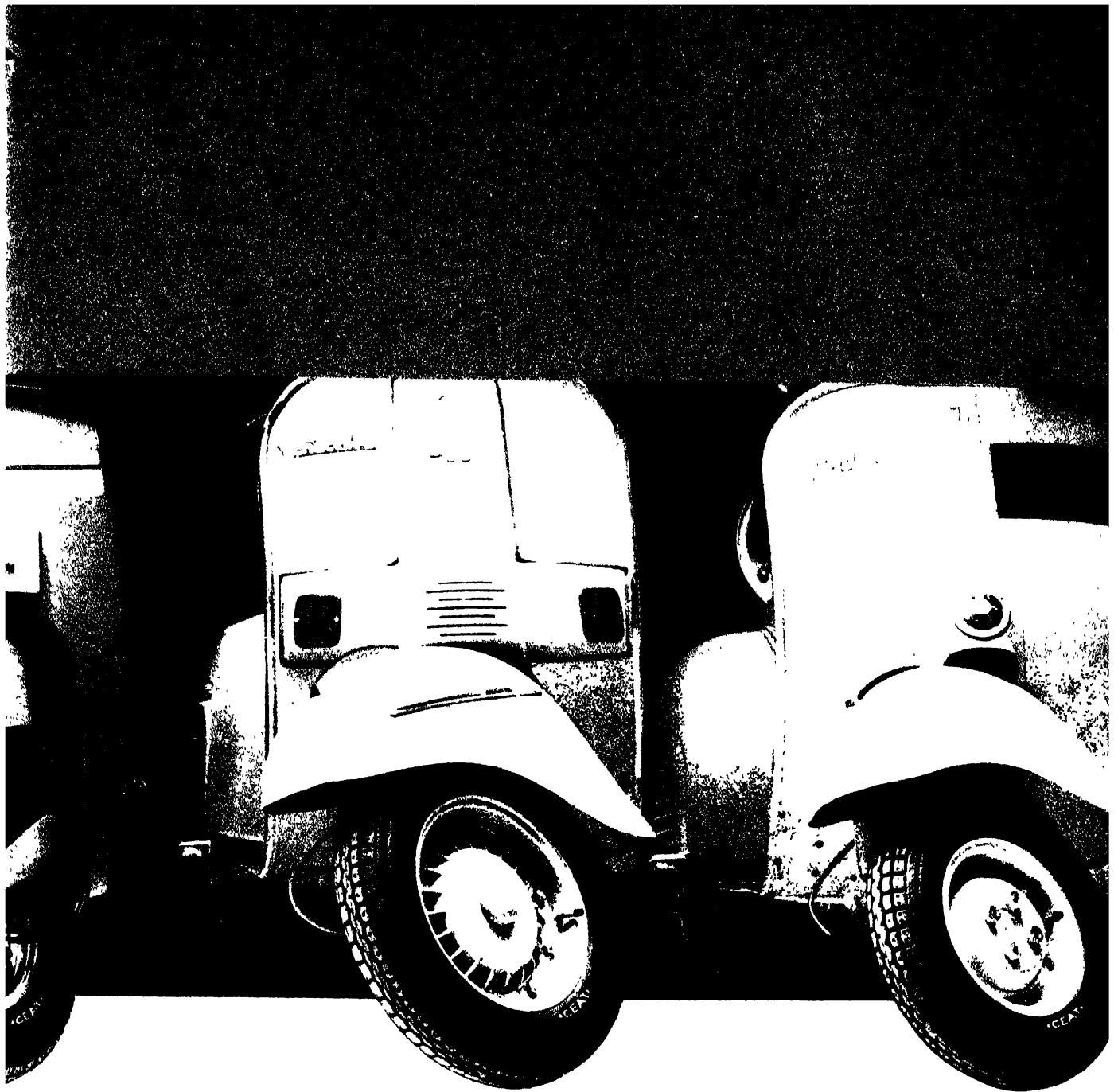
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# Chasing a dream

*The corporate and film world clambers on to the anti-drugs platform*

• 23 March: A division bench of the Bombay High Court cancels the bail granted to alleged heroin peddler, Arvind Mehram Patel, by Justice G.H. Guttal of the same court. Justices M.C. Pendse and D.J. Mohavir instruct the sessions judge hearing the case to ignore any observations recorded by Justice Guttal in his order. "We are rather surprised at the manner in which the detenu secured the bail order. We say no more," comment the judges.

• 21 April: The police dump 300 kgs of heroin and other assorted drugs, seized by them in raids from 1986-89, on the Sewree beach in Bombay. No, this is not a police-sponsored sniff party. The drugs are ceremoniously burnt on the golden sands.

• January 1990: A group of film stars including activist Shabana Azmi get together at Jeetendra's residence to work on an action plan to concertedly fight the drugs menace—a film star festival, street-corner visits to addicts, etc.

**S**uddenly, drugs are public enemy number one. Nobody is too sure of the exact number but everyone agrees that there are hundreds of detoxification and rehabilitation centres in Bombay alone. Not without reason. The city has, at a conservative estimate, as many as 1,00,000 addicts, 80 per cent of whom live in the slums. Health authorities insist that the number could be much higher, especially if the number of foreigners on drugs is also taken into account. More alarmingly, addicts no longer depend on hashish or LSD (Lysergic Diethylamide Acid) to give them a high. Heroin is the name of the fix, and with more and more people taking to "mainlining", the word "junkie" has assumed a new horrific meaning.

While deaddiction and rehabilitation centres proliferate in the city, there is no guarantee as to the quality of services provided. And as allegations and counter-allegations fly thick and fast, the hapless addicts are sometimes caught in the cross-fire. At present, there are only three reliable rehabilitation centres in Bombay: Drug Abuse Information Rehabilitation and Research Centre (DAIRRC), KRIPA and Seva Dhan. But faced with paucity of funds and an indifferent government, even these organisations find it difficult to keep their operations going. And, inevitably, they turn to the corporate sector for financial help; and the corporate concerns, in turn,

rope in the stars.

Dr Yusuf Merchant's is a classic case. The head of DAIRRC approached Godrej Ltd, asking for contributions to his organisation, Dr Yusuf Merchant and film star Jeetendra suggested that the company sponsor an entertainment show, the proceeds of which would go towards DAIRRC. Godrej products would be plugged in the course of the star-studded affair, held at the Andheri Sports Complex, hired for the evening in exchange of Rs 60,000—provided by Om Navani of Om Builders.

**A**nd so was born Life 90, an extravaganza in the best Bollywood tradition. With colourful buntings announcing, on behalf of the stars, "We love life. We hate drugs", in the background, the show began in the presence of such celebrities as information and broadcasting minister P. Upendra and Parmeshwar Godrej, and with a 60,000-strong crowd in attendance. Former drug addict, Sunjay Dutt, delivered an impassioned speech about the evils of drug abuse, and the obligatory song and dance routine followed. Godrej sources say that about Rs 20 lakhs were spent on the show, though the official figure stands at Rs 11 lakhs.

While nobody was quarrelling with the end, many found the means a trifle questionable. Says Ravi Gupta (actual name withheld on request): "Tell me, how many drug addicts went to the show? It was a show for Hindi film stars and rich kids driving around in fancy cars. Man, those guys are not going to go and get involved in smack. I heard that after the show all that people talked about was how or what the stars sang, who was wearing what. Man, what happened to the drug messages? I admire Dr Yusuf Merchant,



**Life 90: an extravaganza in the best Bollywood tradition, with colourful buntings announcing, on behalf of the stars, "We love life. We hate drugs"**



but I personally feel that he made the wrong choice in inviting the film industry to help out with the smack menace."

Eldrid Tellis, an ex-drug addict and now director of Seva Dhan, one of the oldest drug rehabilitation centres in Bombay, also has reservations—though of a different kind. Says Tellis: "If we are not careful, the corporate sector is soon going to use the drug addicts. By saying 'your problem is our problem', they are going to push in their products. We do not want any product endorsement, because there is danger of the product taking precedence over the problem."

Not everyone shares Tellis' animus towards the corporate concern. Dr Merchant, for one, has a very pragmatic attitude to its involvement in the anti-drugs campaign. "We need the corporate sector because, let's face it, that is where the money is. And, in the bargain, if their products receive publicity, what's wrong? I know that in the long run, there exists a great danger of the products hogging more publicity than the drug problem. But right now, we are just beginning. Let us deal with that problem when it comes," he says.

Protap Roy, senior vice-president, Godrej, admits: "In today's world of hard sell, companies will use any platform to which millions are attracted. This platform is a great one, and I must admit that there exists a grave danger of the drug problem being exploited."

At Godrej, however, maintains Roy, they would not stoop to this sort of thing. Nonetheless, company sources confess disappointment at the publicity spin-off of Life 90. The exposure the show—and the products endorsed during it—received on the electronic media, for instance, wasn't anything to write home about. Roy philosophises bravely: "We were attacking a new segment. It was the first exposure for our Cinthol Lime soap product, and it was pretty good."

**D**r Merchant, for one, has no complaints. "I have Rs 1.2 lakhs in the bank because of the Life 90 show and I plan to have one more big bash before the year is out," he says. "After one more show, I can run my organisation on the interest of the money

that I have in the bank." The head of DAIRRC is a trifle apprehensive about advertising taking over entirely, but rationalises: "See, I need the money. Today, social service advertising is the new thing in agencies. So, why shouldn't I take advantage of it? Again, if film stars are willing to raise money for my organisation, why should I ponder over their lifestyles, sins and motives. If someone gets the publicity and I get the money, what's wrong in that?"

Film star Jeetendra, whose brain-child Life 90 was, finds all this scepticism a little bewildering. "I really don't know what will happen in the near future. We wanted to create an awareness of the drug problem and I think

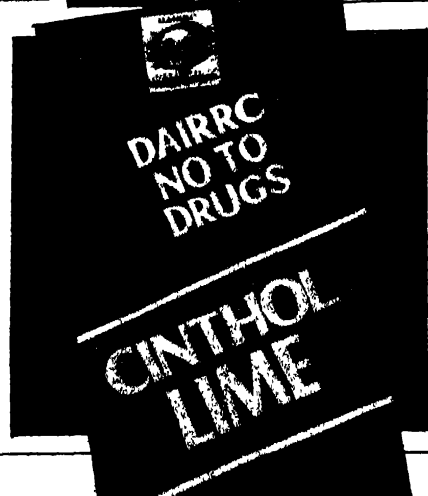
we have succeeded. I do hope that something positive will emerge from all the hard work that the industry has put in."

The Tatas are also putting in some hard work, and a lot of thought, into improving the services that drug addicts in the city can avail of. At the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), efforts are underway to bring all organisations dealing with the drug menace under one umbrella. But this is easier said than done. Agrees Dr Vimla Nadkarni of TIFR: "Getting together the heads of the various organisations is proving to be impossible. They each have their own methods and I know that they do not agree on certain points, but I hope we



(From left) Mazhar Khan, Poonam Dhillon and Dr Yusuf Merchant at a street-corner meeting held to fight the drug menace: star power

At the Life 90 show: (from left) Sunil Dutt, Parmeshwar Godrej, P. Upendra and Dr Yusuf Merchant; (below) hoardings advertising Cinthol Lime at the concert: will the product take over the problem?



can sort this out soon. But the involvement of the corporate world should be handled with caution and monitored well. Shows to help raise money for drug addicts should not turn into show cases for products."

For, all such shows only reinforce the cynicism of the average drug addict. "Boss, the film stars came here, they talked a lot. Now they have gone and I continue to collect rubbish," says Bablu, a 15-year-old rag-picker, bending his head over a foil to begin chasing his troubles away. •

Godfrey Pereira/Bombay



## A FINE TEAM

As partnerships go, you can't ask for any better than this. Reputed director Shyam Benegal has teamed up with Proctor and Gamble chairman Gurcharan Das to produce a new serial for the national network, based on the latter's novel, *A Fine Family*.

Benegal says he found the book "absolutely wonderful" but that "it's still too premature to say whether it will be a long-running serial or a mini-series of five or six epi-



sodes"

Either way, it's fine with Das, who is thrilled that a director of Benegal's stature is handling his novel. As he



**Gurcharan Das and (inset) Shyam Benegal: partners in creativity**

says "If he (Benegal) can give the same evocative feel to this film that he did in *Trikaal*, he would have done a splendid job"

## RETURN OF THE NATIVE

He seems all set to take over from Mohinder Amarnath, the original comeback man of Indian cricket.

First, Dilip Vengsarkar made himself unavailable for the Pakistan tour last year, insisting that he needed a break from the game. Fair enough, said the Indian selectors, and dropped him from the New Zealand-bound

team, maintaining that there was no place in the middle order where he could be slotted. Vengsarkar did get a look-in, though, when Navjot Sidhu injured

**Dilip Vengsarkar: there's no writing him off**



himself half-way through the tour.

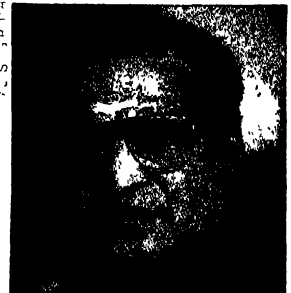
This was, obviously, too good to last. And sure enough, Dilip's name did not figure in the list of Sharjah probables. It was imperative, said the selectors, to build a team for the Nineties and Vengsarkar, unfortunately, was on the wrong side of 30.

But, with three hundreds at the Lords cricket ground, he was also the best bet for the England tour. Not surprisingly then, Dilip Vengsarkar is back in the Indian Test team.

## SHIFTING LANDS

After being booted out of power rather unceremoniously by the Andhra Pradesh electorate, N.T. Rama Rao sought solace in films. But politics rudely intruded here as well, in the shape of AP public works minister N Srinivasalu Reddy.

Reddy alleges that NTR's Ramakrishna Studio, on the outskirts of Hyderabad, has been built on illegally-acquired land. Apparently, Rama Rao had passed an order in October



**N.T. Rama Rao: landed with trouble**

1988, to the effect that peripheral land in five urban agglomerations (including Hyderabad) could be sold/gifted/leased by individual owners, even if it was in excess of the limit imposed by the Urban Land Ceiling Act. According to the state's advocate-general, the order was *void ab initio*, as it went against the preamble of the Act.

So, it followed that the former CM's studio was an "illegal construction".



## TRIBUTE TO TAGORE

There couldn't have been a better way to celebrate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary than this. An evening of music—with renowned Rabindrasangeet singer Suchitra Mitra and *sarod* maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan performing—dedicated to the poet.

The artistes lived up to their reputations and the expectations of the audience, though they maintained that the pleasure was entirely



**Suchitra Mitra and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan performing at the concert: in memoriam**

theirs. Said Khan "It's a great honour to pay my tribute to Tagore on this day. I am grateful to Suchitra for

guiding me in playing Rabindrasangeet."

*Tribute To Tagore*, HMV's new album (with a Bikash Bhattacharya painting on the jacket) featuring the Ustad and Mitra was released on this occasion.



GOPAL SHETTY

## FREEDOM'S NOT ENOUGH

The godown of the Indian high commission in London is as unlikely a home as *Freedom's*

**Sonia Gandhi: love's labour lost**

*Daughter* will ever find. But that's precisely where the Sonia Gandhi-edited book, comprising letters exchanged between Pandit Jawaharlal

Nehru and Indira Gandhi from 1922 to 1939, has been languishing since last August.

On orders from the Rajiv Gandhi government, the high commission bought 1,000 hardback copies of the book, the total cost amounting to £25,000. According to the then external affairs minister, K Natwar Singh, 200 copies were to be distributed to the Indian embassies in Europe, and the remaining 800 shipped to India—freight charges would amount to £2,000 approximately.

Before any action could be taken in this connection, however, the Congress(I) government fell. And with Indira's eldest-born out of power, interest in *Freedom's Daughter* died a natural death.

## IDÉE FIXE

He's out of the communications ministry but he's not over his Sam Pitroda fixation as yet. Small wonder then, that K.P. Unnikrishnan regaled newsmen at the Trivandrum Press Club with his usual anti-Pitroda chatter.

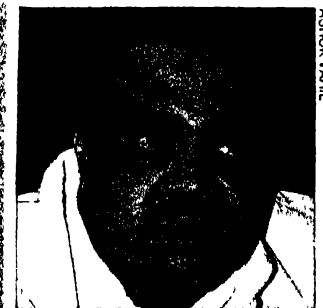
The decision on C-DoT, said Unni, had been taken by the government, and would



**Sam Pitroda: prime target**

stand even though he had been divested of the relevant portfolio.

But wasn't his exit from the concerned ministry a victory for Pitroda? newsmen persisted.



ASHOK VARMA

**K.P. Unnikrishnan: out, but not down**

No, said the minister, "Just wait and see if the government pursues its decision in the matter."

A word of caution: remember to be very, very patient, for it promises to be a very long wait. •





## Rite or wrong?

*The Vedic ritual, Sagnichitya Athiratra, is performed—to a chorus of protests*

It was billed as the revival of an ancient tradition and—at its most ambitious—an attempt to bring peace and prosperity to mankind and the universe. The Sagnichitya Athiratra, a Vedic *yagna* which has a beneficent effect on the environment, was to be performed at Kundur village (about 60 kilometres north of Cochin) by the Southra Sasthra Parishad (SSP), while visitors from all over the world turned up to watch.

The 12-day long Vedic ceremony created controversy even before it got underway, with the Marxist government of Kerala exerting pressure on the SSP to junk its plans. Chief minister E.K. Nayanar declared that by performing such an outdated ritual, the organisers were taking the country back to the pre-historic age. Nayanar also alleged that "imperialist America" had donated Rs 50 lakhs towards the conduct of the *yagna*, thereby putting the country's clock back by hundreds of years. The Kerala Rationalist Sangh and Naxalite groups

took out processions in Kundur, protesting the Athiratra. The SSP, however, remained unmoved, drawing strength from the fact that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had lent its considerable organisational support to the performance of the ritual.

Strangely enough, the last Athiratra had been staged—at Panjal, near Trichur, in 1975—by an American Indologist, Dr Fritz Staal. After the *yagna*, Dr Staal wrote a book documenting the ritual, *Agni—The Vedic Ritual Of The Fire Altar*, now considered a masterpiece. Dr Staal feared that his Athiratra would be the last such *yagna* held in view of the diminishing interest in the Vedas among Indians, and the fast-shrinking number of Namboodiri priests who could conduct it.

This fear had a basis in reality. Ever since the Kerala Land Reforms Act was passed in 1963, depriving the Namboodiri Brahmins of the state of their property, the community had be-

gun moving out. In the process they had forgotten their Vedic traditions, necessary for the conduct of any ritual. Says Dr T.I. Radhakrishnan, neurologist and president of the SSP: "Despite a glorious past with regard to ritualistic performances there are very few experts who know the *sasthras* and *prayogas* to conduct a *yagna*."

It was this realisation that led to the formation of the SSP in Trichur, in 1988, and by June 1989, intensive training and rehearsals of the ceremonies involved in the Athiratra were

**At the yagna site: a steady stream of visitors**





on, under the guidance of the *vajamana* (patron) of the *yagna*

**T**he Athiratra, performed in the open air, is somewhat similar to a performing art. Each participant has to recite certain mantras and perform certain rituals in perfect coordination with the others. (In the Kundur *yagna*, with the exception of a few elderly Namboodiris, all other ritualists were either students or employed as teachers and clerks.) The *vajamana* occupies the pivotal position in the organisational structure of the Athiratra, as he is the master of ceremonies.

The Agni Chayana is a major ritual involving the construction of a fire altar, with 1,000 specially-designed clay bricks, each of which is consecrated by chanting a specific mantra. The altar is built with five layers of 200 bricks each, which, when completed, will resemble a Garuda with outstretched wings facing the east.

The *agni* for the *yagna* comes from the house of the *vajamana*, who performs the Agnihotra ceremony daily and is, therefore, called Nitya Agnihotri. When the Athiratra ends, the entire *yagnashala* is burnt down and the fire taken back to the *vajamana's* house.

The Vedas lay down a strict regimen for the *vajamana*. Among the austerities prescribed is the rule that he can only eat fruits and drink milk. He cannot speak or have a bath as long as the *yagna* lasts (12 days). The Athiratra can only be performed by a man if his wife participates in the rituals as well. The flames of the *homakundus* are preserved in the *vajamana's* house, and used to light his funeral pyre or that of his wife, whoever dies first.

**Dr Fritz Staal who performed the 1975 Athiratra**



During the 1975 Athiratra, some of the rituals were suitably modified. The Pasu Alamphanam (killing a goat by asphyxiation) was dispensed with following a public outcry. In the 1990 *yagna* also, there were no animal killings. There was, however, a slight controversy regarding the choice of *vajamana*.

Just before the Athiratra got under way, there was a birth in the family of Kavapramarath Sankaranarayanan Somayagipad, the person originally chosen as patron. Somayagipad had to remain cloistered for ten days, in accordance with Brahmin custom, and could not participate in the ceremony. On the eve of the *yagna*, therefore, Puthilathu Ravi Semayaipad was chosen as the new patron.

Some of the pundits objected to the change, maintaining that it was against Vedic tenets. But the organisers went ahead with their plans anyway, since they could hardly cancel the *yagna* after all the preparations had been done, and materials such as soma juice procured.

**W**hat made Athiratra 90 particularly important was that it facilitated a scientific evaluation of the effects of the *yagna* on man and nature, the atmosphere and the environment—the first time such studies had been attempted. The SSP invited scientists from different disciplines to conduct experiments in this con-

nection and to monitor the proceedings closely. An air-conditioned laboratory was set up near the *yagna* site, housing such sophisticated equipment as a cardiogram, an encephalogram, a polygraph and a Kirlean camera. Temperature, humidity, cloud patterns, atmosphere gas analysis were studied closely to analyse the meteorological aspect of the Athiratra, as rain often occurs during, or soon after, such Vedic rituals.

During the 1975 Athiratra, Dr Staal admitted that he lacked the competence to evaluate it scientifically. This time, however, a thorough study has been launched into its effects on man, animals and the environment, with examinations of human brain waves, electro-cardiographic and blood pressure changes.

The SSP alleges that the state and central government has remained totally indifferent to the Athiratra. Says K.P.B. Menon, a specialist in



**The Vedas lay down a strict regimen for the *vajamana*, Puthilathu Ravi Semayaipad**

behavioural science and coordinator of the Yagna Scientific Evaluation Committee. "Foreign scientists have shown keen interest while the Government of India has taken the event very lightly. What we are interested in is only an investigation of its ancient science." Adds Dr. Lubon Dostalek, a Czechoslovak scientist who looks suspiciously like a Namboodiri Brahmin in his *mundu*: "It is unfortunate that the Indians have overlooked their ancient traditions which, if tapped and balanced with modern science, can steer the country clear of all crises."

Already, stories about miracle cures abound at the *yagna* site. Preeti (12), for instance, insists that she was cured of asthma after she began attending the Athiratra. Microbiologists, however, have a more credible explanation. They say that, with the commencement of the *yagna*, there was a drastic reduction in the fungal spores in the atmosphere, hence the sudden relief experienced by Preeti.

But the believers weren't having any of this. And streamed into Kundur in ever-increasing numbers to participate in the modern-day miracle fair. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Kundur**



# Listen to Girilal

*The oracle makes sense on editorial rights*



One may or may not agree with Mr Girilal Jain, but he continues to be the most provocative columnist in the business. One of his recent articles in *Sunday Mail* brings out his deep concern at the judgement of Justice Janarthanam of the Madras High Court, holding that *The Hindu* editor, G. Kasturi's decision last October, to withhold publication of a report by the paper's associate editor, N. Ram and correspondent, Chitra Subramaniam, on the Bofors payoffs "would appear" to be an act of "oppression or mismanagement", prejudicial to public interest, or the company's interest under sub Section 1(A) of Section 398 of the Companies Act. Mr Jain, a distinguished former

editor of *The Times Of India*, should know what he is talking about. In a newspaper, can anyone other than the editor determine whether a report is in the public interest or not? Jain is not everyone's concept of an ideal editor, but can any journalist contradict his argument that the absolute right of the editor to allow or prohibit the publication of any material is as valid in respect of his colleagues, however senior, as in respect of others—ministers, officials, advertisers and proprietors. Adds the columnist, "A good editor of my definition would try his best to carry his senior colleagues with him on vital issues, especially relating to their own work, and in fact even explain his reasons for overruling the junior-most colleagues to him. But the final decision is his and is not subject to question by his associates."

Mr Jain, naturally, is appalled by N. Ram's decision to defy his editor and to make available his 'scoop' (collected at the expense of *The Hindu*) to other newspapers. Not many of the present-day muck-raking journalists, would agree with Mr Jain's refusal to view them as the "Conscience of the Nation" and arrogate to themselves the roles of the investigator, prosecutor, judge and Opposition leader, rolled into one.

He rebuts the present glorification of the American press by the local Bradlees and "Woodsteins". In the final analysis, it was the institutions of the American state which got Richard Nixon and caught Ronald Reagan on the Iran-scam, with the journalists at best, providing leads on the basis of interested leaks from within the

**GIRILAL JAIN**



**N. RAM**



Jain's article in the *Sunday Mail* questions the Madras High Court judgement on *The Hindu* case, supporting N. Ram





bureaucracy. And don't forget these journalists were not rewarded with state honours or ambassadorships!

Mr Jain admits that he is in a hopeless minority among his peers but the press would do well to heed his warning that the National Front government is going to be far more intolerant of media criticism than Mrs Gandhi, except during emergency, as well as Rajiv Gandhi. If one goes by the attitudes of Devi Lal, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Om Prakash Chautala, Mr Jain has a point.

## People's Union for Shourie's Liberty

What a turnabout! A recent editorial in the *Indian Express* came out strongly against the PUCL-PUDR-Citizens for Democracy groups for their report on Kashmir. Blasting the "eight eminences" behind the report, it says they are welcome to go on repeating nostrums but should not be taken seriously. The edit writer has discovered that humane and democratic methods are out when one is dealing with a determined, highly

motivated and heavily armed band of murderers and arsonists and ridicules the theory of private violence not being challenged by state violence. Words and phrases like "aggressive fundamentalism", "aggressive secessionism" embellish the edit which ridicules the civil rights organisations for ignoring the disruption of normal life caused by the terrorists.

Fine! But didn't the same paper some months back, day in and day out, highlight the views of the same human rights eminences led by V.M. Tarkunde, Darshan Singh Maini and others on Punjab? The argument, at that time, was that it was state terrorism which was aggravating the Punjab situation, "innocent" Sikhs were being killed all over the place and there was an urgent need to assuage the feelings of the local population.

Well, the Congress(I) was then in power, the BJP was not in charge of national affairs to the extent of nominating Governors, and of course, the Punjab troublemakers were not Muslims. That's rational, objective journalism for you.

## Mid-morning scoop

Quite recently, Bombay's popular evening, *Mid-Day* came out with a scoop which was mentioned in all the local dailies as well as the Bombay stations of All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan. A couple of students approached the newspaper in the morning brandishing question papers of the B Com examination (subject accountancy) to be held the same afternoon. The *Mid-Day* got in touch with the university authorities, found that the papers had indeed been leaked out, alerted everyone.

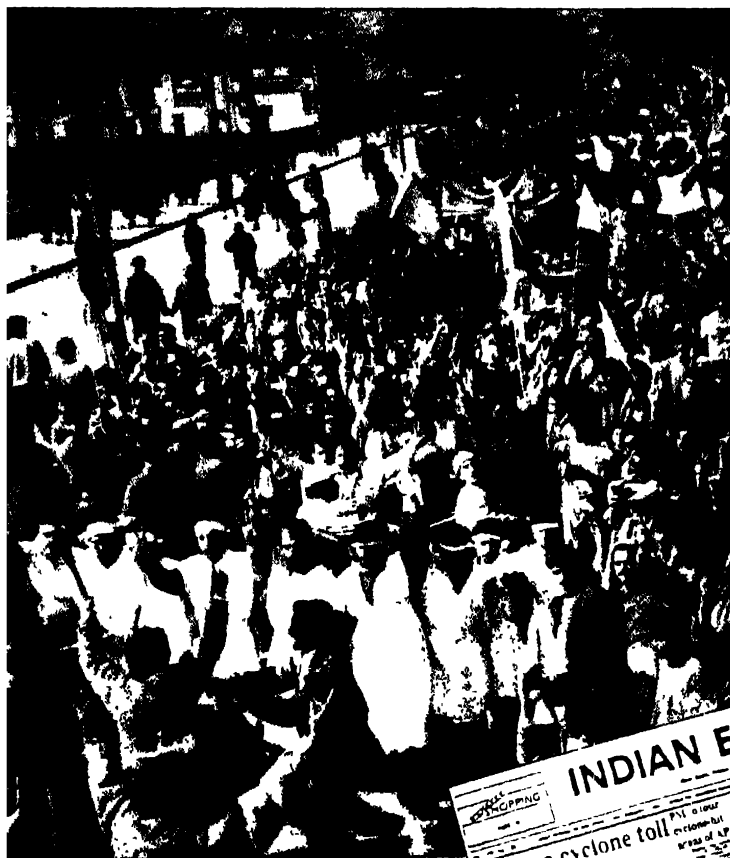
For a couple of days *Mid-Day* basked in its well-deserved glory. The scoop only emphasises that smaller, local papers can achieve a lot if only they concentrate on local happenings and win the confidence of the readers. Bombay is bursting with all kinds of happenings, waiting to be tapped. While some of the smaller papers, trying to achieve a "national" image have chosen to carry too much of national politics, the other afternoon paper seems to be satisfied with the glorification (through publication of photographs and write-ups) of a select group of the local glamour brigade. A paper needs something more besides daily reports on parties.

## Carrying ethics too far?

The Bombay stage recently witnessed the staging of an explosive Hindi play, *Avinash*, *Avinash*, translated from the original Marathi *The Times Of India's* extensive coverage of cultural events ignored the play. Why? Because the play was written by Ms Shanta Gokhale, the art editor of the paper.

Carrying ethics a bit too far? perhaps, the paper should have invited an outsider (not from the paper's panel of critics) to write about the play. *Avinash* won plaudits all round but that would be small consolation for the paper's versatile art editor. ●

## ANTI-INDIA DEMONSTRATION



A recent *Indian Express* edit ridicules the civil rights organisations' report on the Kashmir problem and advocates a hard line.





# No glitter

*But this year's National Film Awards was an unbiased affair*



**Lata Mangeshkar with the Dada Saheb Phalke Award: the only high moment in an otherwise drab evening**

Indian cinema is alive and well and not necessarily confined to Bombay. If the 37th National Film Awards are anything to go by. That's probably why most of Bollywood steered clear of the awards function in New Delhi last week, making it a drab, lacklustre affair. No impromptu, fiery speeches *a la* Shabana Azmi or Homi Sethna, no veteran filmstar collapsing in his chair as Raj Kapoor had two years ago. Instead, only an unending stream of monotonous speeches and bureaucratic procedures characterised the function this year. Except for those brief moments, when a beaming Lata Mangeshkar walked onto the dais to receive the Dadasaheb Phalke Award from President R Venkataraman, to a standing ovation from an overwhelmed audience.

Conspicuous by their absence were the doyens of art cinema who were fêted with awards but didn't come to receive them. Satyajit Ray, whose *Ganashatru* was adjudged the best feature film in Bengali (which jury can resist a Ray offering?), stayed away, much to the disappointment of his admirers. So did Girish Karnad whose film, *The Lamp In The Niche* won the award for the best film on social issues, and Mani Kaul (his *Siddheshwari* bagged the best arts/cultural film prize).

But there were some head-turners at the ceremony from the commercial circuit—a reflection, perhaps of the number of awards this year that have been bagged by “commercial cinema”

There was Mammootty, the new sex symbol of the Malayalam screen, resplendent in a silk *kurta* and *dhoti*—he walked away with the best actor award for his matchless performances in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Mathilukal* and T. Hariharan's *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*. And there was Anupam Kher, the big, bald villain of the Bombay screen, who was felicitated with a special mention for his role in Mahesh Bhatt's *Daddy*—little wonder then, that all the kids flocked to him for autographs after the show.

It is not unusual for national award selections to attract criticism from various quarters. The art film world complains that too much emphasis has been accorded to “commercial” cinema, the box-office *badshahs* swear that the arty ones hog all the attention. This time however, the distribution seems equitable. The more important awards have tilted in

favour of art cinema, especially in the technical categories. The best cinematography award, for instance, went to Virendra Saini for Saeed Mirza's *Salmi Langde Pe Mat Ro* (this was also adjudged the best feature film in Hindi). Hanikumar received the best audiography award for *Mathilukal*. This film also won Adoor Gopalakrishnan the best director's award (the

compere, Komal G B. Singh insisted on calling him the “veteran” director—can't blame the white-haired director for having taken exception to that!). Utpalendu Chakraborty's *Chhanda Neer* bagged both the best lyrics and best male playback singer awards. This was another victory for the art film lobby.

Mahesh Bhatt's *Daddy*, in which Anupam Kher plays a famous singer confronted by an array of complex relationships and emotions, definitely ranks high on this year's commercial hits at the festival. Hovering on the brink between art and popular cinema are *Bugh Bahadur*, which was adjudged the best feature film, *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (which also walked away with the best screenplay, art direction and best costume awards), the offbeat Marathi film, *Kalat Nakalat* (which also won Anuradha Paudwal the best female playback singer award), and Mani Ratnam's *Gitanjali*, a beautifully-created Tamil rendition of a slightly modified *Love Story*. Pervez Meherwanjee's *Percy* was an obvious winner in the Gujarati category, as was Surinder Singh's new cinema offering in the Punjabi film category, *Marhi Da Deeva*.

The non-feature film section had no great winners this time. The best non-feature film award went to Shashi Anand's *Aar Koto Din*, a documentary on child labour, obviously inspired by *Salaam Bombay*. It seems clear enough that the jury was overawed with the subject to the extent of overlooking the technical and conceptual shoddiness of the film.

Though the awards ceremony this year was a comparatively lacklustre affair, what stood out was that there was no regional bias in the selection of the award-winning films. A fact which augurs well for Indian cinema. •

**Shiraz Siddhva/New Delhi**



**Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha: award-winning venture**



# Learning a lesson

*The court upholds the government's decision to peg down the retirement age for teachers at 60*



WEST BENGAL

Thousands of school teachers, and senior Left Front leaders were waiting for Justice K M Yusuf's 8 May judgement. But in quiet, deliberate tones, Justice Yusuf dismissed the writ petition of the West Bengal Headmasters' Association and other organisations. For teachers in the government-aided primary and secondary schools in the state, the extension of service till the age of 65, was not a statutory right, he declared.

For the CPI(M), the big brother in the Left Front ministry, the judgement was a much-needed victory. And the state government's decision to lower the retirement age of teachers from 65 to 60 in government-run schools was vindicated. It is the state government's right to modify an administrative order. Rule 28(1) (iii) of the management of recognised non-governmental institutions (aided and unaided) rules 1969, was a procedural issue, not a statute. The petitioners had challenged the state education department's 31 July memorandum, which said that teachers in all government-aided institutions who were opting for the pay scales revised by the recent pay commission, should retire at 60. The petitioners insisted that they would remain in harness till they turned 65.

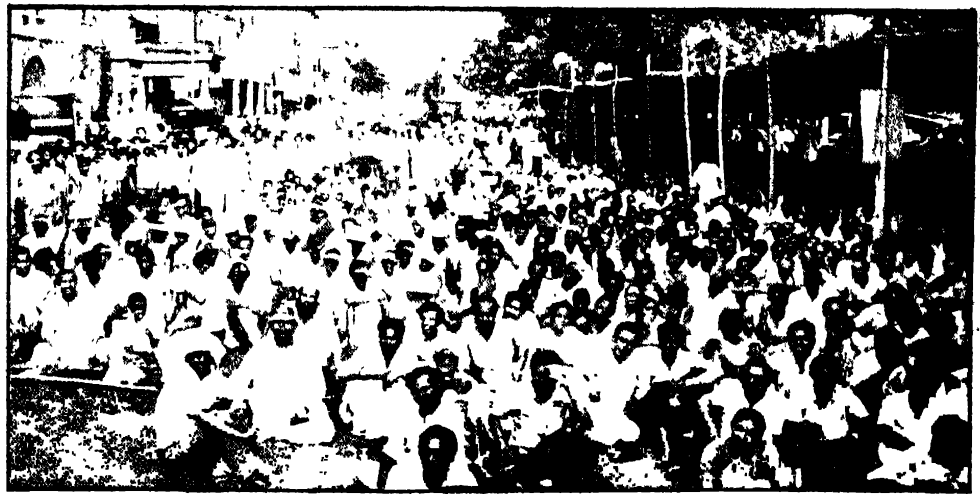
"The memorandum does not affect the fundamental rights of the petitioners guaranteed under Articles 14 and 16 of the Indian Constitution. The court cannot interfere in the formulation or change of an administrative policy of the government unless it violates Article 14 which says that even an administrative authority must

act fairly and treat its employees equally," stated Justice Yusuf.

Yusuf went even further, noting that the state, in the face of the agitation was a model of restraint. He reminded the audience in the sweltering courtroom that the second pay commission's stipulation that the retirement age of teachers be pegged down to 58 years, with a possible extension of two years, was turned down by the West Bengal government. Turning down the petition, Justice Yusuf remarked: "The court must not interfere with a policy deci-

smoke-filled backrooms, the Left Front remains united in the state Legislative Assembly. The unhappy triumvirate did not cast protest votes against the state Education Bill and the differences between Front partners before the municipal polls are largely because of local issues.

But the CPI(M) remains on a sticky wicket, and if a *rapprochement* is delayed, bad will get worse. Before making any major decision, a government is expected to explain its reasoning to the public and edge towards the implementation provided it is sup-



Teachers holding a demonstration over the retirement age issue: losing out

sion of the government if it does not infringe upon the legal rights of the citizen. Giving the teachers time to reconsider, Justice Yusuf directed the government to allow teachers who had opted for the revised pay-scales to revoke the decision by 30 June.

If the CPI(M), under pressure from its allies was saved by the bell, the teachers, and their champions, the Forward Bloc, RSP, and the CPI were not amused. The day after the judgement, the six organisations affiliated to the RSP, the Forward Bloc and the CPI decided to continue their agitation to keep teachers in their classrooms till the age of 65.

Despite the inter-party tensions in

ported by the people. But the Left Front moved with uncommon haste and almost without any explanation. Instead, the state primary and secondary education minister, Kanti Biswas, has reiterated that the teachers, who have received the government's largesse, were unfairly asking for more. The minister is not including inflation in his calculations, counter the infuriated teachers. Sure, salaries have gone up tenfold from Rs 200 per month in the mid-Sixties. But inflation has eaten away most of the raise. It has left them sullen, angry, and after the state government's decision, with an abrupt and early retirement. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**



# Strongarm tactics

*J.B. Patnaik's son-in-law is accused of misusing his connections to take over the management of a college*



ORISSA

J.B. Patnaik has trouble on his hands. And this time it is from his son-in-law. The legal battle for the control of the Maharishi College of Natural Law in Bhubaneswar has reached an interesting stage with the former chief minister's son-in-law, Soumya Ranjan Patnaik being accused of trying to "grab the management of the college and its properties". Soumya Patnaik has been charged with using one Major R.C. Mohanty as "a tool and instrument to create confusion with the object of grabbing the college and its assets", during J.B. Patnaik's regime in 1986. This has put J.B. Patnaik in a tight

*Sambad* of presenting a distorted picture of the college.

The college with 1,200 students on its rolls, was built on three acres of prime land in Bhubaneswar. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Spiritual Regeneration Foundation Movement of India had placed the land at the disposal of the college, while another organisation of the Maharishi, Maharishi Institute of Creative Intelligence, had donated Rs 16 lakhs for constructing the college building and acquiring other assets.

The college was running under a governing body with Dr Gyanendra Mohapatra and Sarojkanta Dash as its president and secretary respectively, after its



**Maharishi College; (inset) Soumya Patnaik: wielding power**

corner, and with the recent raids on his assets, he is now in an unenviable situation.

Sarojkanta Dash, who has been fighting the battle to re-establish his right as the lawful secretary of the governing body of the college and remove the "impostor" Maj Mohanty. He has alleged in his petition to the subordinate judge, Bhubaneswar, that Soumya Patnaik has exercised "his political clout to create all sorts of problems for the functioning of the lawful governing body". Dash has also accused Soumya Patnaik, who edits the daily newspaper

registration under the Society Registration Act in mid-1986. Both are the devotees of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who, according to the registered bylaws of the college, could constitute and reconstitute the governing body which was recognised as the lawful managing authority of the college by the state's education department on two occasions, in 1987, and then in 1989. However, since 1986, the governing body has been effectively prevented from exercising authority after Maj Mohanty allegedly usurped power with Soumya Patnaik's help and political clout. Maj Mohanty has,

since then, been functioning both as the secretary of a parallel governing body and principal of the college.

The parallel governing body was set up under interesting circumstances in 1986. As mentioned in Dash's petition in the court, the state machinery was misused to create a law and order situation in the college, followed by a public meeting to discuss the college affairs. The additional district magistrate (ADM), Bhubaneswar and the deputy inspector general of police (DIG) attended the meeting while the superintendent of police, Bhubaneswar accompanied the DIG to the college. "The sole object was to terrorise the lawful management and throw them out and grab the college and its assets," alleged Dash. In the so-called public meeting consisting of some 100 people or more, a seven-

member committee was set up, which, in turn, appointed a new governing body with the ADM as its president and Maj Mohanty as its secretary. "This was a sheer abuse of power," Dash has pointed out, adding, "no member of the public, no member of the so-called governing body ever contributed even one rupee for the betterment of the college or one inch of land for the college."

Dash and his colleagues approached different authorities seeking protection from hooliganism which was aided and abetted by high governmental functionaries.

Only the education department authorities stood by the govern-

ing body with Dash as the secretary and rejected the one formed with the ADM as the president and Maj Mohanty as the secretary. Despite this, the secretary of the "non-existent governing body" has taken over the college with the result that the real governing body approved by the education department finds itself in a quandary.

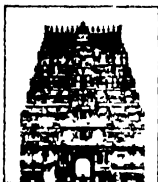
But for the moment, all eyes are on the case which is nearing its final stages. And the former CM's family will definitely hope that the verdict is in their favour. ●

**Sarada P. Nanda/Bhubaneswar**



# Hindu squabbles (cont.)

*Kasturi nearly wins a round against Ram*



TAMIL NADU

There was little to delight in, but there was plenty for *The Hindu's* editor and managing director G. Kasturi to be relieved about. Last week, the vacation bench of the Madras High Court stayed an earlier order by a single judge (Justice S. Janarthanam) which restrained him from chairing

the vacation bench (comprising Justices S. Ramalingam and T. Somasundaram) refused to suspend Janarthanam's order on the last two issues. So, in effect, although Kasturi remains chairman, his powers to take action against Ram and *The Hindu's* general manager N. Murali (a co-petitioner) have been severely circumscribed—if not completely undermined.

In his appeal, Kasturi had charged that Janarthanam's ruling had created



**Although Kasturi (left) remains chairman, his power to take action against Ram (right) has been severely circumscribed**



the board meetings of the newspaper. Janarthanam had ruled last fortnight (on 2 May) that if the board needed to meet, it could obtain instructions from the court about who should chair it (see *The Hindu Divided Family*—issue dated 13–19 May 1990).

Janarthanam's interim order had come as a victory of sorts for the newspaper's associate editor N. Ram, who (along with two other family members) had moved the court seeking Kasturi's removal from *The Hindu's* board for mismanagement and the oppression of minority shareholders. (Their action followed Kasturi's decision to spike a story on the Bofors scandal that was filed by the paper's Geneva correspondent Chitra Subramaniam.) Apart from preventing Kasturi from chairing board meetings, Janarthanam had upheld the appeals of the petitioners that Kasturi be restrained from expanding the size of the board and interfering with the duties of other directors.

If Kasturi isn't delighted by the outcome of his appeal, it is because

"chaos and confusion" in *The Hindu's* administrative set-up and that it amounted to judicial interference in company affairs. He claimed that the ruling restraining the expansion of the board ran counter to the articles of association of the company. He had also stated that as managing director, he had supervisory power over all departments and criticised the court directive which prevented him from "interfering with the functions of directors."

The bench has posted the appeal for final hearing on 14 June. But, whatever the outcome, it appears as if the differences within *The Hindu's* management have become too acute for reconciliations and out-of-court compromises. And if things follow their present course, the battle—which hinged around issues such as press freedom when it began—will end up as a squabble for the control of one of India's oldest and most respected newspapers. •

Mukund Padmanabhan/Madras

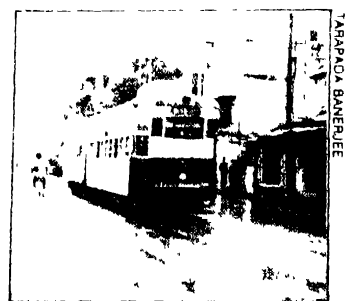
## Derailed?

*Tramcars may be taken off Calcutta's roads*

**L**ong before traffic policemen were deployed on the city streets, or even the Partition of Bengal, Australian Waler horses, yoked to boxy tramcars were charging down the streets of old Calcutta, ferrying passengers from Sealdah to Howrah. These gave way to electrified tramcars in 1900.

Now, however, the state's transport minister Shyamal Chakraborty believes that it is time to pension off the lumbering vehicles that only choke the city's streets. The Calcutta Tramways Corporation, (CTC) formed in 1880 by three intrepid Englishmen, is awash in red ink. Losses in the last six years amount to Rs 84 crores. The state government has been generous enough: subsidies total Rs 62 crores since the mid-Eighties. But the revenue gap is Rs 20 crores (the annual subsidy is about Rs 12 crores) and it is only inching upwards. The CTC is dying, believes the minister and the solution lies in withdrawing the tramcars.

Despite promises of alternative employment, the CTC employees



**A tramcar: uncertain future**

are not amused. "Trams are very popular among the elderly, the young and the physically handicapped," says Subhas Dutta, a tram-driver. "If we can get spare parts we will be able to get more trams and earn revenue." If tram services are discontinued in the future, it is only the people of Calcutta who will miss the mechanical dinosaurs. •

Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta



# From bad to worse

*The situation in Punjab deteriorates as Kashmir becomes the focus of interest*



PUNJAB

Far from improving, the Punjab situation has deteriorated further in the post-election period. The number of terrorist killings has gone up and the police chiefs of the state admit to certain alarming developments since the V. P. Singh regime took over. Says CPI(M) leader

long period of lull, recruitment is brisk once more. Many of the released Jodhpur detenues are back in business again," he says.

And suprisingly, unlike in the past, this time many of the fresh recruits to groups like the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTKF) are merely unemployed youths or anti-social elements, and not hardened religious fanatics. They have no initia-

There are other indications to show that the terrorist movement has taken fresh roots in the past few months. For the first time, the various militant groups seem to be working with a kind of loose unity. The reason is simple: with several 'A grade' terrorists either killed or behind bars, the groups were facing a leadership crisis. They could only keep up the momentum of the violence by sharing their expertise and territories.

As the last few terrorist attacks show, the *modus operandi* of the terrorists has become more sophisticated. In early May, six members of a Hindu family were killed in a village close to Batala. Such crimes have become regular occurrences in Punjab. Only, the trap laid by the terrorists this time was more foolproof.

One group was disguised as Border Security Force (BSF) guards, and the other as Nihangs. The confession note left by the militants stated that this was the gang's revenge for the killing of Toofan, a militant.

Toofan had acquired a 'Robinhood' kind of image in the villages and had been killed in a police encounter a month ago. But the reaction to his killing has deep portents. There were reports that more than two-lakh mourners had turned up for Toofan's funeral. In fact, when questioned about the incident in Parliament, home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed admitted that 50,000 people had attended the ceremony.

All this is having a demoralising effect on Punjab's battered police force. The militants seem to be getting at their targets with precision—the latest being the killings of Harbhajan Chand, the superintendent of police of Amritsar district, and Gobind Ram. The police seems to be fighting with its back to the wall while the militants enjoy the upper hand.

Several months ago, many had expressed fears that Kashmir would go the Punjab way, but now it seems that it is Punjab which will disintegrate like the Kashmir valley. •

**Ritu Sarin/Amritsar**



Militant youths on the rampage: no solution in sight

Satyapal Dang "The National Front government seems to have given total freedom to the militants for propagating 'Khalistan'. This also happened during Bhindranwale's time."

With the attention of the government and the media focused on Srinagar, Punjab is slowly slipping towards anarchy. Unlike the period after Operation Brasstacks when the militants were facing an arms crunch, weapons are freely available today. According to Sanjay Gupta, the senior superintendent of police (SSP) in Amritsar, large consignments were coming in free of cost from Pakistan. "After a

tion to the cult of Bhindranwale but quickly adopt the tactics of the gun-toting militants.

What is even more shocking is that while the terrorists were earlier demanding extortion fees of Rs 5,000, they have now increased the sum by more than ten fold. In parts of rural Punjab, teachers, chemists and other small-time traders have recently received warning notes from the militants demanding amounts to the tune of Rs two lakhs. In some cases, the victims are even forced to pay Rs five lakhs.



# Poaching undisputed

*Nepal's encroachment on Indian territory goes unquestioned*



BIHAR

Unbelievable though it may sound, the Indian government has virtually gifted around 5,000 hectares (12,500 acres) of precious forest land to Nepal. The Nepalese authorities have even set up a police outpost on what is legitimately Indian territory near village Susta, deep inside the Valmikinagar forest tract in the West Champaran district of Bihar. And though over the years, a steady influx from across the border has virtually overrun the Indian population, the West Champaran district authorities have not only turned a blind eye to such blatant encroachment but many of them do not even acknowledge that such a thing has ever happened.

Perhaps the authorities on both sides of the border have compelling reasons to keep mum. The virtually inaccessible Valmikinagar forest range has always been a safe haven for anti-socials and smugglers who have made millions by trading in valuable timber. There are allegations that both the Indian and Nepalese authorities have links with them.

◀ The problem started in 1960, when a gang of notorious criminals of Indian origin residing in Nepal collaborated with forest, revenue and police personnel from both the sides to establish village Susta, well inside Bihar. Poor Nepalese peasants were brought in large numbers and settled there. The Indians did not protest then as any attempt to reclaim the territory could create animosity with Nepal and this in turn could hamper the construction of the Gandak Irrigation and Power Project.

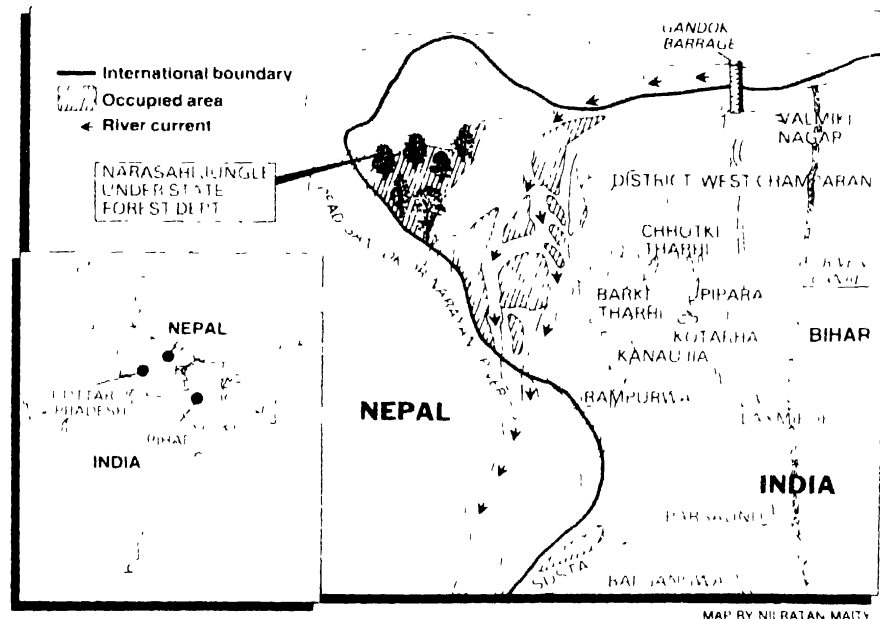
But the villagers residing in the border areas of Bihar did raise their voice. The local MP, Kamalnath Tiwari, even launched an agitation in 1961 but it was crushed, ironically enough, by the Nepalese Royal Army (NRA). On 23 January, 1964, the NRA fired on a procession of Indian villagers killing several and injuring many more.

The incident made New Delhi sit up. High-ranking officials from both India and Nepal met at the Kotrahi guest house near Valmikinagar to sort out the problem. The meeting was presided over by the then Indian ambassador to Nepal A R Deb. But unfortunately, nothing came out of the high-level talks.

Since then, there has been a steady influx from Nepal. Trees were felled indiscriminately and villages set up

The Indian population was pushed deeper into Bihar. Moreover, Nepal gained substantially from the changing course of the river Gandak. Said Jagdish Ram, a resident of the area, "Till ten years ago, I used to cultivate land across the river as far as three miles. Now, the land has been occupied by the Nepalese." Lateef Khan, who is a marginal farmer, too, echoes Ram's sentiments.

The present India-Nepal boundary along Bihar's West Champaran district was demarcated by the former Surveyor General of India, Col L H Jackwon in 1921-22, which largely honoured the agreement between the British and Rana Jung Bahadur of Nepal. Even after Independence, the Indian government made no attempts to re-demarcate the boundary.



Map showing the border areas which have been occupied by Nepal

**There are allegations that both the Indian and Nepalese authorities have links with the smugglers in the border areas**

And Nepal made full use of India's lack of concern in the crucial issue. The most surprising aspect is that senior administrative officials of Bihar feign ignorance when questioned about the goings-on. Said a confident P S Cheema, the state's forest secretary, "We have no information of any such illegal occupation of Indian territory." Amar Singh, the deputy director of Bihar State Forest Development Corporation, felt the same. "We will look into the matter only if we get complaints." The sub-divisional officer of Bagha, under whose jurisdiction the area of contention falls, however, admits that Nepal has encroached upon Indian soil. "But unless the forest department lodges a complaint, I can do nothing," he said. ●

**Subodh Mishra/Patna**



# Selectors' googly

*The Board of Control for Cricket in India stumps players from Bengal—the Ranji Trophy champions*

**W**hat does it take to represent India in cricket? This is the question uppermost in the minds of the dashing young players who won the Ranji Trophy for Bengal, after 51 years in the wilderness. And it is a question that Messrs Raj Singh and company, whom that master craftsman Mohinder Amarnath described as "a bunch of jokers", have failed to answer once again.

Bengal has had a long-standing grouse of being ignored at the all-India level for decades together. There has always been a seven or eight year gap before players from Bengal are selected to play for India. Selectors down the years have said that since Bengal hardly ever went up to a stage higher than the quarter-finals of the Ranji Trophy—the national championship of cricket—it was difficult to include them in Test squads.

This was an argument reluctantly accepted by the players who toiled for recognition. But, then came early 1989 and Bengal reached the final of the Ranji Trophy. They lost to Delhi by quite a huge margin, which may have been the reason why players from this state were rejected by the selectors.

There were no excuses for Bengal's 1990 success, however. Yes, they did win on run quotient, but that was within the rules formed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. However, this legitimate victory still failed to impress the selectors. Not a single player from India's champion state found a place in the team for the tour to England in late June. This has come as a surprise to many eminent cricketers like former captain Ajit Wadekar.

In Bengal, this is being seen as Delhi's backlash, with Bombay's blessings. It may be recalled that Bengal got past Bombay before avenging last year's defeat in the final at the Feroz Shah Kotla, with a better run quotient at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta,

where rain marred the five-day match.

Both Raj Singh, chairman of the selection committee and Bishen Singh Bedi, team manager for the overseas tour, had in the recent past praised quite a few of the Bengal players. The ones named frequently were opener Arun Lal, Sourav Ganguly, off-spinner Saradindu Mukherjee, pace bowler Dattatreya Mukherjee, as also Subrata Banerjee. But among those selected were constant failures like W V Raman and Sanjeev Sharma, while untested players like Nayan Mongia also found easy berths. There is also the two-match wonder Anil Kumble whom the Bengal players had to contend with.

Former Bengal stalwarts like Gopal Bose, who was selected for India but never really got to play Tests on a

regular basis, expressed himself strongly against the "step-motherly treatment" meted out to Bengal players. He said "Gundappa Viswanath had told me that he would fight for Arun Lal. What happened?" Bose felt there was no reason for staying the Ranji Trophy if the best players on show weren't given an opportunity to represent the country. "Lal has proved himself time and again—against Imran and company and against the deadly pace attack of the West Indians. Besides, since Srikanth had already been dropped, there was no question on the next best opener."

Raju Mukherjee, who has had a long innings for Bengal and East Zone and was rather unlucky in not being selected for India, felt the inclusion of

**Arun Lal receiving the man of the match trophy for his sterling performance in the Ranji final: but ignored by the national selectors**



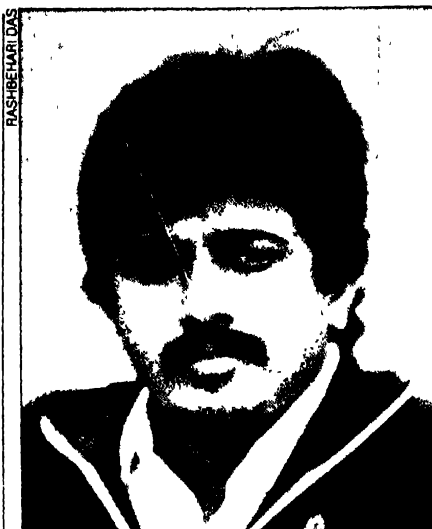


Sanjeev Sharma was unfair to both Subrata Banerjee and Dattatreya Mukherjee "Sharma has been tested and on the domestic circuit has not been as successful as the two Bengal bowlers. So how does he get in?"

Raju was even more critical on the issue of off-spinner Saradindu Mukherjee "Raj Singh said India didn't have any good off-spinners. Apparently, captain Azharuddin insisted on Arshad Ayub. Whatever be the reason, the fact is that Saradindu has been playing well. Raj Singh's excuse was that he had been seen in just one and a half matches. So how does he explain the inclusion of Vivek Razdan for the Pakistan tour? The lad hadn't been seen in any first class match.

Raju Mukherjee didn't talk only about Bengal players. "What about Railways' Praveen Amre? Are three centuries/double centuries not enough to convince the selectors that this is good material? That was his achievement in the Duleep Trophy. Last year, too, he did well in the Ranji Trophy."

But it was Sambaran Banerjee who came out with a scathing attack. The Bengal captain who retired immediately after presenting the Ranji Trophy to the state in its tercentenary



**Saradindu Mukherjee: why wasn't he selected?**

year, said, "My question is not why none of my boys were selected, but how they went unnoticed. The East Zone selector is Ramesh Saxena. This man had the best opportunity any selector from this zone has ever had of including players from Bengal. He had players who had got together to beat all the top cricket-playing states of the country over the last two years. We've beaten Punjab, Bombay, Hyderabad, Tamil Nadu and Delhi

"What more is there to prove. We couldn't have done this without good, in fact, outstanding performances from several players. And these, with a great degree of consistency, because you don't win cricket matches by just riding on luck. The point is, if a selector from whose zone such performances have come cannot get any of his players into a Test squad, the least he can do is to resign. If I was in his position, I would certainly have done so. Let us hope he does so—and quickly."

**E**ven if Messrs Raj Singh and company's argument that Bengal players didn't merit inclusion because they were "ordinary" is to be taken for its face value, how could they ignore precedent, even in this sphere? Players like Ghulam Parkar, Ajit Pai and Suru Naik

had been included in previous Test teams because they had represented the champion state. With players like Arun Lal, Saradindu Mukherjee, Sourav Ganguly and others, the label "ordinary" does not hold. And these players are several cuts above the three who had been selected on earlier occasions.

Bengal's most illustrious cricketer Pankaj Roy said, "During the Ranji Trophy, the selectors had said they may not take Arun in the Sharjah squad, but he would definitely be in the team to England. Now I see that there is a wide gap between what they say and what they mean. How can you exclude the boy—and also take two leg-spinners at the cost of a single off-spinner?"

CAB officials were stunned by the news because, the day before the formal selection of the team was to take place, they had received word that at least two players, Arun Lal and Saradindu Mukherjee, would be included in the squad. The young off-spinner had even been told to get his passport ready for the tour. The sudden change in attitude will naturally lead to a lot of fireworks over the weekend after the selection. Raj Singh, too, will have to give some explanation.

Arun Lal seemed shattered by the decision. "Why should I carry on playing?" he asked. The opener had been repeatedly assured during the Ranji finals that he would be definitely included in the team to England. It was a harsh blow for the player who has been in and out of the Indian team for many seasons. But youngster Saradindu swallowed his disappointment quite well. "I'm going to play with renewed concentration. I will prove myself." However, Saradindu and Sourav have an outside chance of getting into the team, provided some players are found to be medically unfit.

The last word should be reserved for Ajit Wadekar. This is neither a balanced side, nor a team of the Nineties, he said. "There are three openers in the side. But actually, there are two and a half. And the English weather should have been taken into account. There, we need a calm and composed opener. Why wasn't Arun Lal included? And why weren't Srikanth and Praveen Amre considered?" Wadekar should know for, he was the first Indian captain to win a series in England. •

**Arjit Sen/Calcutta**





# In search of GOI

*Doing the rounds of New Delhi, the celestial city*

**A**CROSS our country, among both the highest born and the lowest, the richest and the poorest in chief ministers' houses, in remote villages, in sleepy hamlets and bustling cities, there is a new god. He is omniscient, omnipotent, savage, uncaring. He is not a kind god but his word is law. There is no appeal, no escape when he has issued a commandment—unless, of course, he contradicts himself suddenly, which he often does. This is the only sign that he may be a human god. He is spoken of everywhere, but usually in the same tone, which is a mix of awe, resignation and a hint of bitter despair. And his name is the "Government of India".

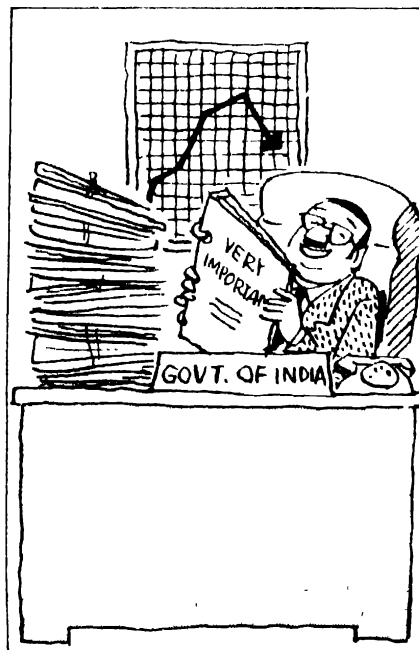
Supposing a susceptible individual is smitten with devotion—seeing his power, his fame, his glory—a sentiment to which a depressing number of our people succumb, and decides to set out on a pilgrimage for his *darshan*, what would he do? First, of course, he would hasten to Delhi, since it is well known that this is the celestial seat. On the way the devotee would witness vast multitudes (a mobile Kumbh Mela) headed the same way, and would take heart that he was moving in the right direction.

Having alighted at one of Delhi's odorous railway stations and settled himself in a hostelry, he would decide on the future course of action. Discreet enquiries having availed him nought, he might decide to dart hither and thither, no doubt encouraged by auto-rickshaws and taxi drivers. Surely, he would argue with them, that just as there is a Gaumukh, the source from which the holy Ganges flows, there must be a similar fountain-head for this infinitely mightier deity whose saliva fertilises the remotest spot in India, and whose every whim is as a tornado shattering the dreams, the homes, the very cities of millions as though they were bamboo huts in a gale. Where does this demonic deity reside?

Somebody might, perhaps, guide

him to Parliament, so thither he would rush, clutching marigold garlands. Sitting anxiously in the visitors gallery he would pay close attention to the proceedings below, anxious to pinpoint the deity. He would listen to the Opposition and to the ruling party and deduce that one was questioning the Government of India and the other was answering for it, but neither was the government itself. So who or what or where was the government?

Puzzled, he would stumble out, and there on top of Raisina Hill he would see the magnificence of Rashtrapati Bhavan, so resplendent, so majestic, that surely this could only be home to the Government of India. He would smuggle himself inside and wander with increasing conviction through its splendour, perhaps suppressing a rising sense of ecstasy. Until he chanced upon the President dictating a letter to the Prime Minister, demanding to know what course of action the Government of India planned to pursue regarding the terrorists in Punjab. Thoughtfully, our seeker would wind his way out feeling that since it was the Prime Minister being written to, perhaps he was the Government of India.



**L**et us imagine that he was somehow able to secrete himself in South Block and listen to the Cabinet meetings. The PM would have received the President's letter and would be discussing it with his colleagues. "The Rashtrapati wants an answer," the PM would say, "so what is the view of the Government of India on the matter?" Once again our hero would reel out.

The bureaucrats, it would dawn on him, of course it is the bureaucrats, he would think excitedly, they must be the ones. Next morning he would position himself at Lodi Gardens and wait for the home secretary to walk by on his morning stroll. "Excuse me, your highness," he would say to the home secretary as he neared, "but the Rashtrapati wants to know what the Government of India is planning to do with the terrorists in Punjab?" The home secretary would look at him coldly. "That is for the Government of India to decide, why ask me?" he would say and stride off.

Plunged in gloom, the devotee would steal away, no closer to finding the Government of India now, than when he first flushed with devotion in his remote hovel. Despairing of his fruitless quest, he would be guided, perhaps by chance, perhaps by some divine force, to the gracious environs of the Press Club. There he would spot a group so warm, witty and wise, that even to his untrained eye they could only be staffers and columnists for SUNDAY magazine. Apologetic at interrupting their high-minded discourse, he nonetheless made bold to enquire, "Excuse me sir, but what is the Government of India, and where can I find it?"

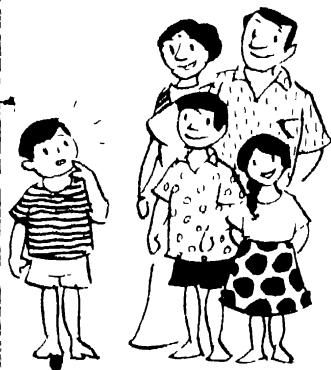
One of the group, a little shorter, from certain angles a little balder, certainly a lot braver, understood the situation instantly. "There are files on every issue," he snapped, "and whoever has the file currently on a particular issue, why, he is the Government of India. Now pay for the beer and push off."

And that is how the devotee found out who was the Government of India. •



## Much ado about nothing

■ Adoption isn't easy. This seems to be more so for non-Hindus. According to the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, only Hindu parents can adopt. And the term 'Hindu' includes Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs as well. But for the others, the rule seems to be more stringent. Simply put, there is no law. They can, at the most, take up the guardianship of a child, under the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890.



Under the Hindu Act, a couple can adopt only two children—one male and one female!

Recently, in Bombay, a couple wanted to adopt three children—two boys and one girl—all of the same family. The authorities would have none of it. They said the parents could only adopt one boy and one girl and take the other boy as a ward! Alternatively, they needn't take the second boy at all. While the first would mean showing favouritism, the second option would be too cruel. Ultimately, all three children were made wards. So much for adoption!

## Novel protest

■ This was a protest march with a touch of imagination. And the issue was the recent hike in petrol and diesel prices.



Residents of Tiruchi recently took out a procession on the busy West Boulevard Road, with a scooter drawn by a bull. Accompanying the strange spectacle was an army of people shouting slogans demanding that the central government withdraw the price hike. The ingenious ruse may not pay off. But as far as protests go, this was certainly a unique one.

## Fair exchange

■ So far, only gold biscuits and heroin had caught the

imagination of smugglers. But now, saris and even fish are taken across the borders by smugglers. Recent seizures by the Border Security Force (BSF) personnel have shown that the illegal transportation of saris to Bangladesh via Tripura, Cachar and Mizoram was the highest in 1989. Not that it was a one-way traffic. Fish from Bangladesh too have been carried into India through our well-guarded borders. It is a fair barter indeed!



# THIS INDIA

**BHOPAL:** Fadali Singh, 30, an adivasi, had his left hand and the little finger of his right hand chopped off by his employer, all because he went home from work without permission. A bonded labourer working on a 12-acre farm in Bhoora village near Bhopal, Fadali owned only three maunds of food grains every month. Every time he asked for leave to go home, he was threatened by his employer of dire consequences. Undeterred, Fadali went home only to return the next day when his employer's brother asked him to report for "just a little work." The poor labourer, a left-hander found himself without his hand—*The Independent* (Indranil Basak, Calcutta).



**RANCHI:** The demand for a roti (bread) led to the loss of five lives. CRPF personnel at a camp near Palamau

were having dinner in their unit. A jawan demanded a roti from the mess-in-charge who refused. An altercation followed after which the jawan fetched his rifle and shot down the mess-in-charge. Meanwhile, other CRPF personnel picked up their rifles and chased the jawan. In the exchange of fire, four others lost their lives—*The Times of India* (P.K. Dutta, Nasik).

**MADRAS:** The caution exercised by a brakesman and the crew of the Nilgiri passenger train landed them in trouble. When the train was about to cross a bridge, the brakesman at the head of the train reportedly sighted some elephants crossing the track at a distance. After sometime, the crew decided to resume the journey, but as the train started, an army of giant bees descended on the train and stung the passengers. The brakesman who signalled a halt and his colleague at the rear end were stung the most. Most of the passengers too, had a harrowing time—*The Hindu* (T.V. Ravi, Madras).

**RAIPUR:** A life convict in the central jail here has been waiting for eight years for an operation. The convict, Dinanath Soni, says that the jail authorities have been refusing to send him to the government hospital for the operation because there are no personnel to escort him. The operation has reportedly been put off ten times in one month—*The Times of India* (R. Gopal, New Delhi).



# SUNDAY WEEK

BEGINNING 20 MAY 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



This week is favourable for artistes, so go ahead with innovative ideas and you will be successful. Businessmen should pay utmost attention to their work. A journey is in the offing.

**Good dates:** 20, 24 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 6

**Favourable direction:** North

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



This is not a favourable week for you. Suspend any changes you might have made in your plans since brighter prospects are waiting for you. Speculators and gamblers will be successful.

**Good dates:** 23, 25 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 6 and 9

**Favourable direction:** West

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This week lawsuits and debts may cause you some anxiety. On the professional front, your efforts may not bear fruit, but do not lose heart. The domestic front will not be peaceful.

**Good dates:** 21, 23 and 24

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 4 and 6

**Favourable direction:** East

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



All indications point to fruitful changes in your profession this week. Speculative ventures will yield good results. You will be helped by your associates. A visit to a distant place is likely.

**Good dates:** 20, 22 and 23

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



This week businessmen may face opposition and challenges. Avoid arguments. If you rely on your intuition this may be a good week for you. Tact and patience will help you in your profession. The time is ripe for romance.

**Good dates:** 22, 24 and 25

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 9

**Favourable direction:** West

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



This is a good week for courtship and marriage. Success in most business ventures is likely. Employees may get promotions. Do not be too optimistic and guard against deception.

**Good dates:** 24, 25 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 6 and 7

**Favourable direction:** East

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



This week will be favourable for friendship, courtship and matrimonials. The health of an elderly relative may cause some anxiety. This will be a hectic week for all professionals, especially creative people.

**Good dates:** 21, 23 and 25

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



This is not a lucky week for you. Avoid arguments with your seniors. On the financial front, there may be a slump. For businessmen, concentrated efforts may yield desirable results.

**Good dates:** 23, 24 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** South

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



This will be a good week to start a new venture. A long forgotten matter will surface suddenly to bother you. However, there is nothing to worry about. Your domestic life will run smoothly.

**Good dates:** 21, 22 and 24

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 6 and 7

**Favourable direction:** North-west

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



A good week for you. Businessmen will finalise new contracts. With confidence and the help of your friends, you will be successful. The time is right for love and marriage.

**Good dates:** 22, 23 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3 and 4

**Favourable direction:** South

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



This will be a week of mixed fortunes. The financial front will be successful, enabling you to make a few purchases. A domestic upheaval may cause you some anxiety. Keep an eye on the health of your family.

**Good dates:** 20, 21 and 24

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 5 and 8

**Favourable direction:** East

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



You are likely to prosper on the social front and meet influential people. You may go on a trip in the middle of the week. A new friendship or romance is indicated and matters of the heart will make steady progress.

**Good dates:** 20, 23 and 26

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 3 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—LEO

*The Leo man should be aware of his financial responsibilities. Or else, the relationship may not be a stable one. The Libran woman should be prudent enough to keep silent about her achievements. Otherwise, her partner's jealousy might come in the way of a smooth relationship.*



## On the offensive

■ The Youth Congress(I) has interesting plans. Its new president Ramesh Chennitala feels it's time his boys got cracking again. And he has drawn up ambitious programmes, at least one of which is designed to send shivers down the spines of all Indian males. The YC, says Chennitala, is all set to make family planning a major issue again.

His other projects include the re-establishment of the Youth Congress(I) in such strife-torn states as Punjab, Assam and Kashmir. "Young people in these states must be brought back to mainstream politics," he says. "They have to be told about the Congress heritage and why its values are essential for a strong and united India." Chennitala, however, does not disclose how he intends to do this. Surely, this does not mean that Congress White Shirts will march around beligerently, bumping off terrorists and frog-marching virile males to the operating table?

Fortunately, Chennitala gives the impression of being a reasonable man. A product of Kerala politics, he understands the importance of consensus.

## George the Giant-killed

■ At present, the war for Kashmir is being fought between Union minister George Fernandes and the state Governor Jagmohan. And the latter seems to be winning—the minor skirmishes, at least.

Recently the minister in charge of Kashmir affairs rounded up around 25 political activists from the Aligarh Muslim University and despatched them to

HEARD AT PRATEEKSHA

**I am one of the people who got this government elected but I cannot support what they are doing to my friend Lalit Suri.**

SHATRUGHAN SINHA



**Fernandes: off-loaded**

Srinagar to "mobilise public opinion in the state". Jagmohan got wind of the plan and sabotaged it by



**Jagmohan: hot line to PMO**

refusing the group permission to enter the curfew-bound city. The young men were, instead, put on the

## THERMOMETER

### Film stars and politics

■ **Shatrughan Sinha:** In a bind. Gets on better with Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal than he does with the Raja. Disapproved of Laloo Yadav and the Bihar Cabinet. But is still typed as the government's man. Should break ranks and speak out sometime soon.

■ **Raj Babbar:** A Raja loyalist, he retains his access to Race Course Road by virtue of his relationship with Rani Sita Devi. His problem is that nobody else in the government likes him and even within the Raja's inner circle, there are fights galore—some over money.

■ **Sunil Dutt:** Keeping a low profile. Has been a surprisingly effective constituency MP but he didn't want to stand in 1989 because his daughter-in-law Richa was unwell. Now that Richa is on the road to recovery, he may resume taking an interest in politics.

■ **Rajesh Khanna:** His political activities were restricted to a few farcical public meetings on behalf of the Congress(I). And now, as far as the party is concerned, he might as well not exist. His mentor Moti Daryanani is also cut in the cold.

■ **Shabana Azmi:** The smartest of the lot. Has recognised that the Children's Film Society is not for her. So, she's looking for routes more suited to her personality. Will be a member of Parliament within the next five years.

next flight to Delhi.

An incensed Fernandes called up the Prime Minister's Office to complain. Only to be told that Jagmohan was acting on instructions from the PMO.

And the PMO was, of course, acting on instructions from the BJP.

## Looking to the Raja

He'd been hailed as *Sher-e-Up* when he returned from England, having tended to the bullet injuries sustained during poll violence in Amethi. But a mere two months later, Janata Dal leader and principal side-kick of the Raja, Sanjay Singh finds himself totally marginalised as far as Uttar Pradesh politics go.



**Sanjay Singh: out in the cold**

First he was kept out of the Rajya Sabha nominations, even though as many as six of the UP candidates were V.P. Singh's men. The party bought his silence by promising him a Vidhan Parishad seat and a berth in the state Cabinet. That didn't work out either.

Sanjay Singh is now hoping that the Raja will revive his political fortunes. But there's not much that the Prime Minister can do—even with the best of intentions—as long as UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav remains an implacable foe of the Amethi princeling. ●



## Point that camera here

Rajiv Gandhi's smiling visage may be off Doordarshan, but the countenances of Union ministers Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, Ram Bilas Paswan, I.K. Gujral, P. Upendra and George Fernandes have been much in evidence of late. Much to the displeasure of such lesser lights of the Cabinet as Sharad Yadav, Nathuram Mirdha, Manubhai Kotariya and Neelamani Routray.



**P. Upendra: not receptive**

These deprived souls have now decided to take their case into the information and broadcasting minister's court. So far, Upendra has not been particularly receptive.

Perhaps, the ministers don't know how lucky they are. Look what TV did to Rajiv Gandhi!

## Deja vu (reversed)

Nobody is willing to say so openly but in Delhi's political circles, they are already saying that any India-Pakistan war in these circumstances could well be a repeat of Bangladesh—except that India and Pakistan would switch sides.

The evidence?

HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

**V.P. Singh has sat on the fence so long that the iron has entered his soul.**

A BITTER JANATA DAL MP



**V.P. Singh (left) and Benazir Bhutto: repeat of 1971, with a difference?**

## BAROMETER

*Who will be on which side in the event of an Indo-Pak war*



**Iran:** Called off I.K. Gujral's visit to Teheran early this year and is still cold towards India on Kashmir. A confirmed friend of Pakistan



**Saudi Arabia:** Known to be helping Pakistan—both with money and material. Certainly doesn't want India and Pakistan to fight, but if they do, will support the latter



**USA:** Is riding the crest of a global peace wave and wouldn't like anything to come in the way of the *bonhomie* with the Russians. Therefore, is likely to stay neutral.



**USSR:** Given a choice between protecting its newfound goodwill in the US and supporting India in case of a war, will definitely choose the former. Will oppose the war and stay neutral.



**China:** Will be ready to support Pakistan with arms and equipment. Is even providing it missiles.



**Afghanistan:** India's most obvious friend in the subcontinent. The Najib government has so far defeated Pakistan's attempts to dislodge it. Will be ready to help India in any way it can.

Well, there's Kashmir, for starters, which is in roughly the same situation as East Pakistan was in 1971 with a population that could actively assist the enemy.

Then, there are the individuals.

In 1971, India had a sharp, shrewd woman Prime Minister. In 1990, Pakistan has Benazir Bhutto.

In 1971, Pakistan had weak, vacillating leadership. General Yahya Khan was hassled because he had Z.A. Bhutto on his tail. In 1990, V.P. Singh heads a minority government and he has the BJP to contend with.

In 1971, Pakistan decided that the Bengalis were cowards and that the *danda* would take care of the problem. As Governor, it had Tikka Khan, who saw the situation as a pure law and order problem. In 1990, many Indians take a similar line on Kashmir. And we have Jagmohan playing the Tikka Khan role.

Convincing? Perhaps not.

Worrying? Certainly.

## Man of the world

When bureaucrats in the MEA (ministry of external affairs) were told that their new minister of state was a Bihari, they looked down their snobbish noses with disdain. Worse, they had nightmares of their ministry being run by some crass, paan-chewing, K.K. Tewari-type figure, spewing gibberish every time he opened his mouth.

Imagine their surprise when they discovered that minister of state, foreign affairs, Harikishore Singh, was an Oxonian, with an M. Phil. in political science.

And that he could actually tell white wine from red!



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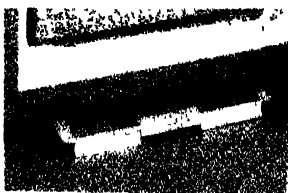
SPORTS



# KEEP AWAY FROM THE HERD




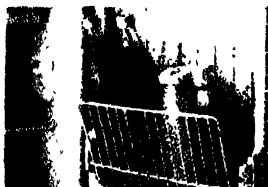
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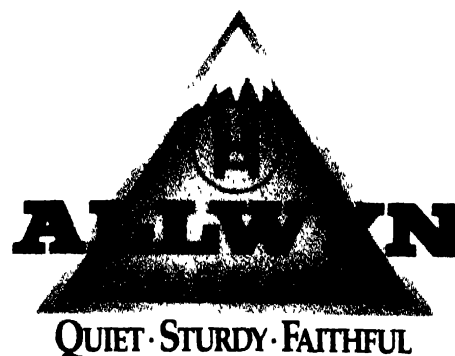
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AMITABH INTERVIEWS SHATRUGHAN

# SUNDAY

Jyoti Basu  
helped V.P.  
Singh become  
PM

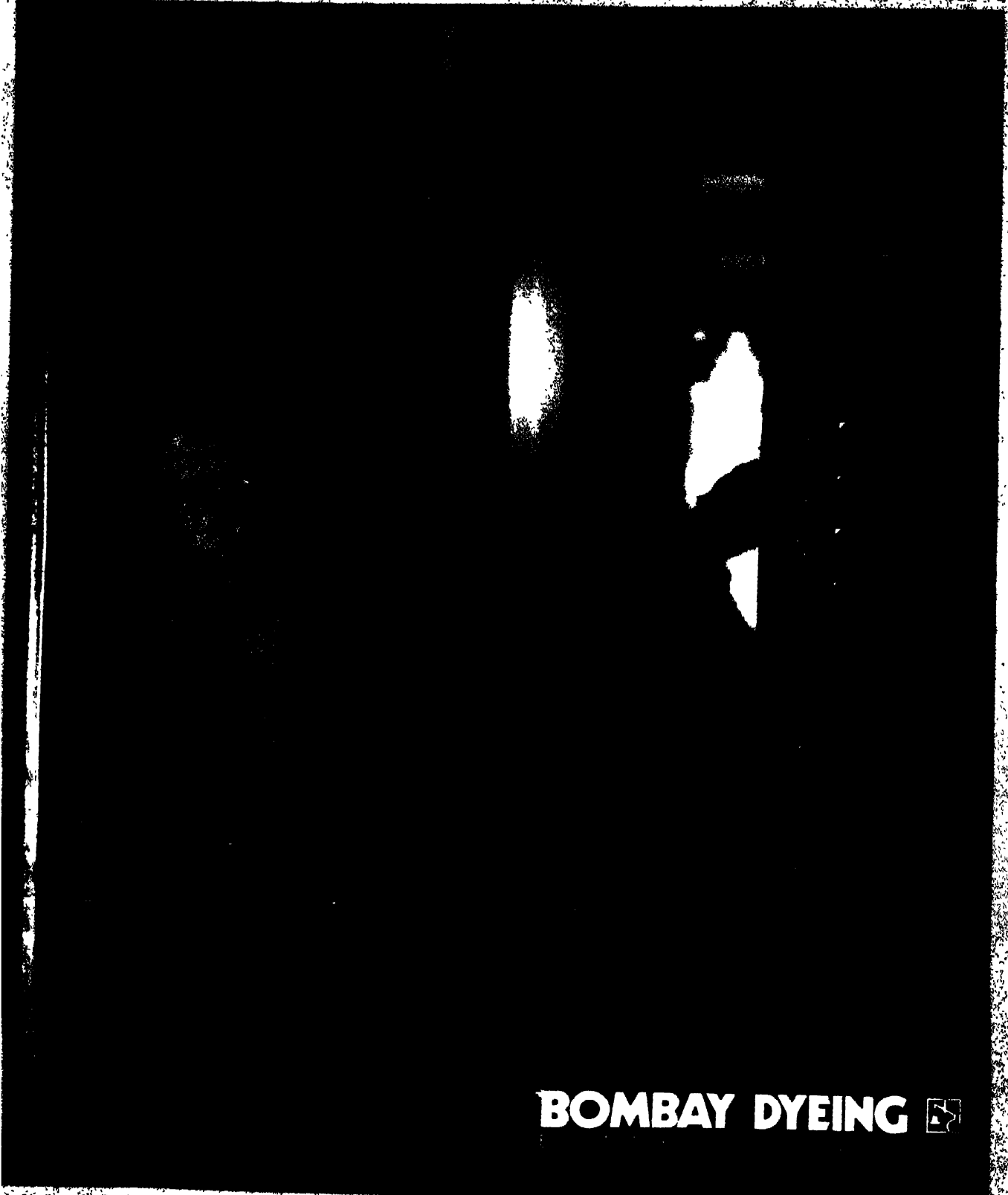


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30

COVER STORY

## Why is Jyoti Basu so powerful?

Because, he

- helped V.P. Singh become PM
- effected the compromise between the Ambanis and the government
- got major projects cleared for West Bengal

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The Congress(I) loses power in Nagaland

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With the PM agreeing to review the Narmada project, the activists win the first round



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Nobody knows how to tackle the ULFA menace—but all blame the AGP



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Shatrughan Sinha on politics, disappointment and vindictiveness. Interviewed by Amitabh Bachchan

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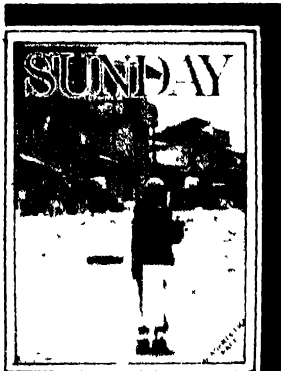
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**Cover transparencies:**

Jyoti Basu by Nikhil Bhattacharya,  
Amitabh Bachchan and Shatrughan Sinha by Gautam Patole





## Blaming Pakistan

**W**hen in trouble blame Pakistan. Time and again, India has used this ploy to divert the nation's attention from pressing domestic issues. Now that Kashmir is burning, the present government is taking recourse to this strategy yet again (War '6—12 May). But getting tough with Pakistan will not help. The people of Kashmir are fed up with New Delhi and

in both Kashmir and Punjab, but it would be wrong on the part of India to go into a military confrontation with our neighbour. War is just not the solution. Moreover, we must remember that Pakistan has increased its military might over the years and a war at this stage will be a bloody and frightful affair. A battle must be avoided at all cost.

S V Jaswal, New Delhi

## In defence

**T**he article on Kashmir gives a distorted picture of the events in the valley (*The fire inside*, 25—31 March). The nation is aware of the diabolical game which Pakistan is playing to destabilise India. Pakistan is training and arming terrorists in Kashmir and Punjab. There is ample evidence to substantiate this charge. The security forces exercised complete restraint while

very difficult to single out the terrorists. Whenever the army has opened fire, it has done so in self defence and in the interest of the masses. Moreover, the casualty figures reported in the article are grossly exaggerated.

Lt Col O.N. Saxena, Ministry of defence, New Delhi



Nayanar: orthodox stance

## Conservative communists

**T**he interview with Kerala chief minister E.K. Nayanar (*"Kerala is a difficult state to govern"*, 1—7 April) was thought-provoking. While answering a question on the recent happenings in East Europe, Nayanar said, "It is a bourgeois campaign that communism is dying." This remark emphasises the conservative attitude of our communist leaders. It is high time they modify their views with the changing times.

Diganta Chakraborty, Santiniketan (West Bengal)

■ It is true that whenever there was an Opposition government formed in Kerala, it was under the shadow of uncertainty because of the Congress government at the Centre. Such a situation was created by the Congress leaders in the state. They made it a point to support the central government always, without considering the problems of the people in the state. Whenever in

power, they felt that the demand for the allocation of more funds from the Centre was a harassment to the government at the Centre. They, therefore, abstained from asking for what was the share of the state allowing the Centre to continue its step-motherly attitude.

Of course the people of Kerala are peace-loving and hardworking. The middle-class has always controlled the political power of the state, because, most of the leaders, (especially Congress leaders) are from middle-class families. So, that section of the society has emerged as a force to reckon with in Kerala, politically and otherwise.

The difficulty in governing the state should not be mixed with the religious views of its people, as indicated by C.M.E.K. Nayanar. In spite of different religions the atmosphere in the state is secular particularly in comparison to other states in the country.

Francis Thottunkal, Bombay (Maharashtra)

## Not fair

**T**he indictment of Kiran Bedi by the Wadhwa enquiry commission came as a surprise and is indeed unfortunate (*A cop under fire*, 6—12 May). If the arrest of lawyer Agnihotri is "justified and lawful"

Kiran Bedi: facing the flak



Securitymen patrolling a troubled area in Srinagar: paradise lost

they are determined to make the rulers hear them. Rather than pointing an accusing finger at our neighbour, the present regime will do well to redress the long-standing grievances of the Kashmiris.

S. Hussain, Dibrugarh (Assam)

■ There is no doubt that Pakistan is actively encouraging trouble-makers

dealing with this menace.

By now it is clear that a handful of anti-national elements have been holding the peace-loving people of Kashmir to ransom. Efforts of the forces have thus been directed to isolate and apprehend these trouble-makers. But the security forces have been greatly handicapped because it is



then how can the police officer be accused of acting dishonestly and of using her office for "personal vendetta" The fact that she was even criticised for calling a press conference to make her stand clear was totally uncalled for Such incidents adversely affect the morale of the police force

**Mitali Mohanty, Bhubaneswar (Orissa)**

## Babu culture

The cover story unnecessarily made heroes out of bureaucrats (*Rule of the babu*, 29 April—5 May) The likes of Gopi Arora acquired enormous powers solely because the person he worked for was basically weak and uncertain of himself

But if the politician is a strong-willed person, bureaucrats can never call the shots Take the example of Jawaharlal Nehru He did not ever allow any civil servant to take decisions on policy matters—that role he reserved for himself and his Cabinet colleagues But since Lal Bahadur Shastri was a weak Prime Minister who always kept a low profile, bureaucrats and political hangers-on assumed prominence Today, if Vinod Mehta is hitting the headlines every second day, it is because V P. Singh is incapable of taking firm decisions on crucial issues

But there are politicians even today who make bureaucrats feel like school kids Devi Lal, Jyoti Basu and N T Rama Rao are some of them Union ministers like George Fernandes and Madhu Dandavate, too, are capable of keeping civil servants under control

**Ashok Kumar Mohapatra, Bhubaneswar (Orissa)**

■ The cover feature was absorbing. But there was nothing new in the sense that bureaucrats have been

wielding extra-constitutional power since Independence. Every Prime Minister had their favourites and it is they who ruled the country. Our political system is largely responsible for this phenomenon The bureaucracy is an essential part of the democratic set-up but it is the elected representatives of the people who are responsible for keeping bureaucrats under control If the politician is a person who cannot decide on crucial issues, it is only natural that bureaucrats will emerge more powerful than the minister himself

**S.P. Chaturvedi, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)**

■ There is nothing wrong with the institution of the bureaucracy, it is the babus who are demigrating the system.

**T. Lal, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)**

## An unequal battle

It is clearly an unequal battle (*Can Ambani survive?* 15—21 April) On one side you have Prime Minister V.P. Singh On the other there is the polyester king, Dhirubhai Ambani And it is a foregone conclusion that the person who frames the rules of the game will win

**M.D. Ladharam, Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh)**

■ I was closely following the war between Ambani and V P. Singh Though

**Dhirubhai Ambani: giving up?**



**Mann: success all the way**

Dhirubhai was clearly at the receiving end, I hoped that he would not give up without a fight But his subsequent resignation from the L&T board disillusioned me Has Ambani settled for peace with the present regime? Or is he just waiting for the present government to fall?

**G Anil, Quilon (Kerala)**

## Love-struck

The write-up (*Return of romance*, 15—21 April) touched the right chord There is no denying the fact that with the remarkable success of films like *Maine Pyar Kiya* and *Chandni* teenage romance has returned to films in a big way. Unlike in most other movies where passion is depicted in a crude form, *Maine Pyar Kiya*'s approach to the theme is refreshingly simple Though the storyline of this box-office hit is a bit hackneyed, it certainly does away with such routine formula like sex and violence, which is a healthy sign. And if the current trend is any indication, then the coming years will see many more such films.

**Shashank Shekhar, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)**

## Making waves

The article on Gurdas Mann (*Mann and supermann*, 15—21 April) was timely Mann has not only caught the attention of the pop music lovers of the country, but his folk tunes are real hits. It goes to his credit that he has made a place for himself even in Bombay where the competition is always tough

**D.N. Rajan, Thane (Maharashtra)**

## More on Mahfouz

It is unfortunate that Khushwant Singh's excellent write-up/Naguib Mahfouz (29 April—6 May) should have appeared in his column, *Gossip Sweet and Sour* For the article is neither sweet nor sour. It also appears that Singh is confused over timing when he says he had read "excellent reviews of Mahfouz's book in the British press a few days ago". This is not true because Mahfouz's book, *The Beginning and the End* received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988 and there was no occasion for the British press to review it.

**Dara Kadva, Bombay (Maharashtra)**



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## SIGHT AND SOUND



R.K. LAXMAN: THE TIMES OF INDIA



together to reduce tensions

**MARTIN FITZWATER**, *White House press secretary*

■ The minority government has no right to talk of war to cover its lapses.

**RAJIV GANDHI**, *AICC(I) president*

■ We are not satisfied at remaining near the bottom of the global ladder in terms of per capita income. We intend to do better.

**V.P. SINGH**, *Prime Minister*

■ How long will women continue to be raped and Harijans burnt in the country? I want to hear the answer from the Prime Minister

**VASANT SATHE**, *Congress(I) member, on the alleged rape and burning of a Harijan*

woman in Fatehpur district

■ I must tell the Prime Minister that when I joined politics, he was in his political infancy

**M.L. FOTDAR**, *Congress(I) leader*

■ Everybody is surprised when I smile. But even Salman (Rushdie) smiles. You can't survive without a sense of humour

**MARIANNE WIGGINS**, *wife of Salman Rushdie, author in hiding*

■ Why ask me questions on party lines? I am not interested in parties, I am interested in the people. I belong to the people who elected me. You see, I am actually inclined to a one-party system.

**B.B. LYNDOH**, *Meghalaya chief minister*

■ Since I am not 16 and not Sonam, let's say I do not wish to be doing what she is doing. I will have to create the role I want to do

**SUSHMITA MUKHERJEE**, *television star*

■ If one goes back to 1947, the Hindus got India, the Muslims got Pakistan, but the Sikhs got nothing

**S.S. ANN**, *Unni, J Akali Dal (Mann) president*



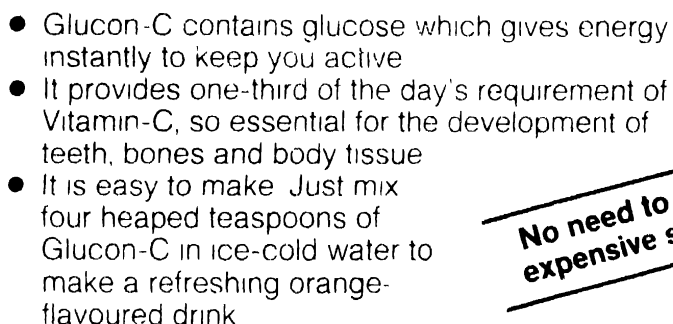
■ A great sin is not to provide bread and butter. A greater sin is to snatch it away. In Kashmir we are committing both the sins.

**GEORGE FERNANDES**, *Union minister in charge of Kashmir*

■ Both India and Pakistan must determine the future of Pakistan peacefully. We hope that these two democratic governments, both friends of ours, will work



**(Not just a thirst quencher)**



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INDER MALHOTRA

# Distant neighbours

*India should take an interest in Burma's affairs*



Burma (sorry, Myanmar) is the country next door about which we know little and seem to care even less. This is a disgrace. Especially, at a time when the ruling party's "think tanks" are crying themselves hoarse notwithstanding Pakistani mischief in and over Kashmir about "good-neighbourliness". Strange though it may seem, the bulk of Indian intelligentsia appears to have convinced itself that India has only six neighbours, i.e. those countries which, along with it, comprise the SAARC. In their consciousness, even China is not India's neighbour but a great and somewhat distant power. For them, Burma just does not exist although it has a 4,000 km sensitive border with this country.

Things were not always so bleak. Until 1935, Burma was a part of British India. Thereafter, the two countries worked in close cooperation which was not surprising, given their mutual strategic, political and economic stakes and the empathy between their freedom movements. After Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru had made a point of it to cultivate Burma and its leader, U Nu. Burma also was the first neighbouring country to which Nehru sent Indian troops at the request of the Burmese government beleaguered by a series of insurgencies that have continued to this day.

The military takeover in Burma, under the leadership of the ineffable General Ne Win, marked the beginning of Burma's own drive to go underground and cut itself off from the rest of the world. Most Indians in Burma had by then been thrown out and Burma had even withdrawn from the UN. Even so, this was no reason for Indian indifference to a country vital to Indian interests. And yet indifference unfortunately developed after the end of the Nehru era rather fast.

The very few Indians who continued to take some interest in the all but forgotten Burma felt sad that a country which was once the world's biggest

exporter of rice had become an importer of this staple grain. They also worried about the impact on Indian security of the pronounced Chinese influence in the insurgency-infested North Burma, from where much help was then being given to Naga and Mizo insurgents in India's north-east in any case. However, eventually this problem receded and the lingering little interest in Burma subsided further.

After 27 years of Ne Win's uninterrupted rule, Burma once again attracted world attention only in 1988 because of the massive popular upsurge for democracy, freedom of speech and association and liberalisation of an economy that had been virtually strangled to death by socialist controls. For a while, there was hope that the long night of Burma's agony would at last end. But it was snuffed out savagely by yet another military coup led by General Saw Maung, the Burmese army chief, but in fact masterminded by Ne Win. The ailing and shadowy old war horse continues to call the shots in luckless Burma.

The elections, promised at the

**U. Nu with Nehru: India should have continued from where Nehru left off**



height of the popular upsurge and still scheduled to be held on 27 May, coinciding ironically with Nehru's death anniversary, have become a cruel farce. A newspaper headline said it all the other day when it proclaimed "Burma all set for elections". Opposition leaders under house arrest.

The Burmese government crushed the democracy movement with far greater brutality than even the Chinese displayed at Tiananmen Square. And they seem to have got away with it more easily than Deng Xiaoping and his cohorts have. Nobody seems bothered by what is happening in Burma, not even the hyperactive human rights groups here that have been writing lurid and wholly one-sided reports on Kashmir.

A number of countries—Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and, of course, China—are merrily doing business with the execrable Burmese regime and bailing it out of political isolation and economic ruin. They all have their eyes on Burma's legendary timber, desperately needed in this age of ecological evangelism.

India need not go out of its way to befriend the tyrants entrenched in the Burmese capital. But shouldn't some gesture be made to the Burmese people who listen to All India Radio as avidly as Indians and Pakistanis do to the Hindi and Urdu services of the BBC. The tragedy is that while not many Indians are going to Burma, the thugs of the Burmese government are merrily crossing the porous border—about the smuggling of narcotics and consumer goods the less said the better—to harass the Burmese students who have taken shelter in north-eastern states.

The South Block ought to hang its head in shame. More than a year has elapsed since the last Indian ambassador to Rangoon (sorry, Yangon), Dr I P Singh, retired. A new ambassador has yet to be appointed. This is so not because India does not want to send an ambassador to Burma as a mark of displeasure with the repressive regime. What is at work is the normal, honest-to-goodness casual approach



# The VP doctrine

*Keep everyone happy and forget about the consequences*



Janata Dal MP Santosh Bhartiya thought it was V P Singh's finest hour "Never in Indian history have we seen a Prime Minister interact so intimately with the people and get this kind of response," he declared grandly. The 2,000-strong crowd gathered at the Nehru Centre seemed to agree with Bhartiya. It was a 'performance' alright, on a scale of one to ten it would get VP an eight for spontaneity, candour and modesty.

Resplendent in a light-blue *achkan* with a matching Nepalese cap, the PM, none the worse after a gruelling survey of a cyclone-ravaged Andhra Pradesh, enthralled and entertained the audience, assembled to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Current* by accepting written questions which he himself read and answered. The novelty of the dialogue led some sceptics to ask if the questions had been 'planted' too, I can vouch for their authenticity. As a result, Mr Singh gave us a glimpse of not only his style, but also his perception of the business of governance. Profoundity and wit mingled freely as the Prime Minister had his first 'fireside chat' with the nation since he assumed office less than six months ago.

I don't know how seriously one can take Mr Singh's discursive meanderings since they were so laden with theatrical elements, but I am giving him the benefit of the doubt. The tone and tenor of the

dialogue certainly suggested that he was very keen to be taken seriously, very keen to be seen as a 'thinking' Prime Minister rather than just a trapeze artiste holding on to power.

While I enjoyed the performance too, I came out slightly uneasy. Not because one could actively disagree with what V P Singh said, but because his approach to governance, as outlined in his lecture, will exacerbate, not ease, the many grave problems the country is grappling with.

**P**olitics, according to Mr Singh, raises its ugly head only when there is conflict when there are competing options or ambitions. "If there

is no conflict, there is no politics," he asserted. His approach to conflict-resolving is not to strive for 'compromise', which according to him is another word for 'bargaining', but to 'manage contradictions' inherent in all conflicts. And how are the contradictions to be managed? By discussion, debate and goodwill, through which a consensus will eventually be arrived at. If one persevered through the path of contradictions determinedly and patiently, consensus was guaranteed. Mr Singh then proceeded to illustrate how he was managing 'contradictions' in Kashmir and gently chided newspaper pundits who accused him of 'confusion' on the issue. "If they understood my approach they would not find me confusing."

I may be wrong, but I don't think the Prime Minister has ever explained his political philosophy in public so succinctly before. We should be grateful to him for such rare openness, because ministers, particularly Prime Ministers, seldom emerge from the shadows, much less reveal the precepts through which they function. So, why am I uncomfortable with V P Singh's approach to problem-solving?

In happier days, politics as the art of 'managing contradictions' may have been a useful, even estimable, doctrine, but with AK-47s in the hands of secessionists, war clouds on the horizon, communal mischief in the air, not to mention the galloping price of onions, the VP doctrine may lead us into blind-alleys and one-way streets. We are already there with regard to three or four areas high on the national agenda.



**V.P. Singh:** His approach to conflict-resolving is not to strive for 'compromise', but to 'manage contradictions' inherent in all conflicts



In Kashmir, contradictions were managed by appointing Jagmohan (as Governor) to appease the BJP, and George Fernandes (as minister with special responsibility) to appease the communists. A further justification for this dual approach was provided by asserting that Jagmohan would bash the secessionists, while George would woo local politicians to come out of the woodwork. On paper this makes sense in practice it has led to Jagmohan and Fernandes spending more time in mutual recriminations than in doing the jobs given to them. One day George threatens to resign, he is persuaded to stay on. The next day Jagmohan threatens to resign, ambition in the state does not seem to be the pursuit of terrorists or reviving political processes, but keeping George and Jagmohan in their respective posts

## MANAGING CONTRADICTIONS

### KASHMIR



Appointed **George Fernandes** as minister with special responsibilities to appease the communists, and **Jagmohan** as Governor to appease the BJP  
**Result:** They spend more time in mutual recriminations

### PAKISTAN



**Inder Gujral** is left to make all the decisions on Indo-Pak crisis, while **Benazir Bhutto** hits the headlines every day by making important decisions herself  
**Result:** She scores valuable debating points

further when RAW leaks, circulated with the blessings of certain NF members, claimed that LTTE camps had surfaced in the state again. A furious Karunanidhi savaged RAW charging that its agents were trying to destabilise his government.

Curiously, nothing was done to halt these charges and counter-charges from being traded in the press. Eventually, Mr Karunanidhi did something unpardonable. While denying that there were any LTTE camps in his state, he revealed that 36 such camps, where armed training was given, did exist in Tamil Nadu during Indira Gandhi's prime ministership. Thus, Mr Karunanidhi confirmed what successive Indian governments had been vehemently and consistently denying. It was a shameful admission, one which diminishes the authority of all Indian governments. Clearly, con-

**'M**anaging contradictions' on Pakistan has not been easy either. About a month ago, the Prime Minister warned the nation to be 'psychologically prepared for war'. That single statement rang alarm bells in Washington, Moscow, Beijing, London and Islamabad, where it was seen virtually as a declaration of war by India. Chastened by that solitary indiscretion, Mr V P Singh has since then said nothing meaningful on defusing tension and has only repeated *ad nauseum* that Indian armed forces will give a 'fitting reply if the occasion arises'.

I can understand Mr Singh's dilemma. With Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee ready to pounce on any move that appears even remotely conciliatory, the Prime Minister seems to have gone against his natural instincts as a peace-maker. He began by sounding tough and war-like—a posture which, perhaps, he recalled, made a national hero of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Currently the Prime Minister has seen fit to

withdraw from the Indo-Pak crisis, leaving Inder Gujral to make all the running. Meanwhile, Benazir Bhutto regularly hits the headlines by proposing a summit one day, third-party verification of Indian charges that Pakistan is abetting terrorists the next day, embarking on a round of personal diplomacy in Africa and the Middle East soon after. Because he is 'managing contradictions' Mr V P Singh cannot respond, thus allowing Ms Bhutto to score valuable debating points.

Strange things are going on in Tamil Nadu. The DMK, an important ally of the government, has been threatening to secede from the Front. Ever since Mr Karunanidhi refused to accept 'refugees' from north and east Sri Lanka, relations between New Delhi and Madras have been strained. The high point in the rift was witnessed when the Tamil Nadu chief minister pointedly refused to attend the welcoming ceremony for the last IPKF contingent. Relations plummeted

traditions were not managed efficiently here.

Even before he became the Prime Minister, there was a respectable body of opinion that maintained that Vishwanath Pratap Singh was a decent, upright, ambitious human being with a single weakness: he was soft. The 'butcher instinct', so necessary for a Prime Minister or President, was missing in him. I didn't go along with this premise then, and I don't now. Unfortunately, this insistence on turning governance into an exercise in consensus has all the appearance of calculated cowardice.

I am not oblivious to the vulnerability of the present government. Managing contradictions, then, may be less of a political philosophy and more of a survival technique. Nevertheless, in the national interests, I would urge Mr V P Singh to do two things. One, he must stop running around the country inaugurating dancing schools. Two, he must occasionally throw consensus to the winds and do what he feels is right.



# The toppling game

*Defections bring down the Congress government in Nagaland*

**T**he timing couldn't have been more perfect. Only a few days back, the legendary Naga leader, Phizo, who died in London on 1 May, was laid to rest in Kohima. The emotional upsurge witnessed at Phizo's funeral provided an opportunity for the dissidents within the Nagaland Congress to break away from a party that is largely looked upon as a colonial outfit by the different north-eastern tribes demanding autonomy or independence. On 14 May, 12 legislators of the ruling Congress(I) government in Nagaland sent a one-page letter to their leader and chief minister S C Jamir informing him that they had decided to quit the party. For Jamir, the implications were more than clear. In a House of 60 members, the Congress(I) was reduced to a minority with just 24 legislators. What is more, the Opposition Nagaland Peoples Council (NPC), which had a strength of 24 in the Assembly, was waiting in the wings for such an eventuality.

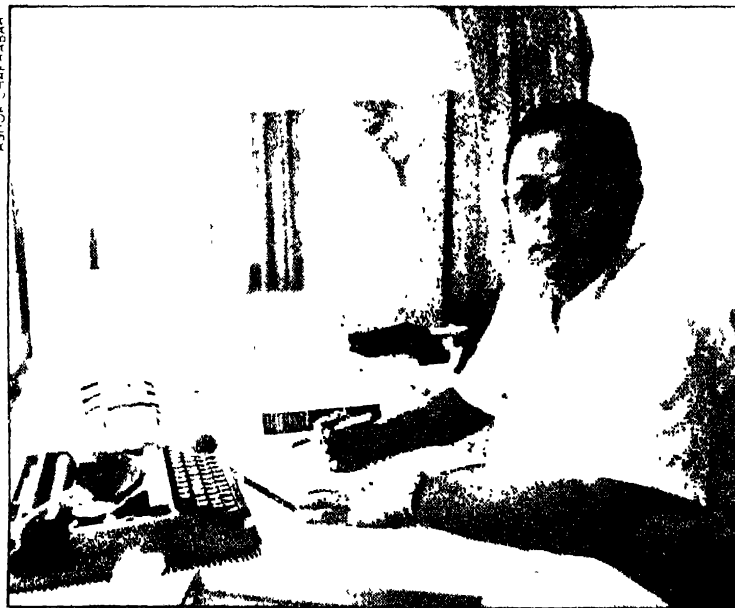
Events followed in quick succession since then. The breakaway Congress faction joined hands with the NPC to form a platform—the United Legislature Front (ULF)—and staked its claim to form the government in Nagaland. Jamir made a last ditch attempt to convince the newly-appointed state Governor, M M Thomas, to call an emergency session of the Assembly to prove his majority. The Governor turned down the appeal and on 15 May, he dismissed the S C Jamir ministry. Hours later, Thomas invited the NPC leader K L Chishi to form the government. Such was the haste that on 15 May itself, Chishi took oath as chief minister along with 14 members of his Cabinet. And sure enough, all the 12 Congress legislators

who had deserted Jamir were accommodated in the new ministry.

But is S C Jamir just a victim of the domino effect that has seen Congress governments in the north-east fall like ninepins after the installation of the National Front regime in New Delhi? Surely, there is much more behind the fall of the Congress in Nagaland. In fact, former chief minister Jamir knew that rebellion against him in the party was brewing for quite sometime. And

shen Chang to give finishing touches to the plan to topple Jamir. Later, the group also held a meeting at the official bungalow of home minister Liameron Ao. Finally, when everybody was convinced that the plan would work, the press was informed of the intending coup.

**B**ut Jamir did not give up without a fight. As soon as he got wind of trouble, he was on the line to party president Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi. Rajiv Gandhi immediately summoned a meeting of his north-eastern experts, Santosh Mohan Dev, Rajesh Pilot and Jagdish Tytler. Hiteswar Saikia, the president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, was also consulted and a strategy to tackle the crisis in Nagaland was worked out. Jamir was instructed to win over the Speaker of the House and make efforts to woo the dissidents. But as all the 12 party legislators were virtually kept under surveillance by members of the NPC, Jamir could not even contact them. But as



**Chief minister K.L. Chishi: smart move**

the man who was masterminding the operation was T A Ngullie, a one-time minister in his Cabinet whom he sacked in January last for anti-party activities. Moreover, as a measure aimed at dividing the dissidents, Jamir expanded his Cabinet only last month, inducting at least three of the disgruntled Congressmen.

But that obviously did not help to quell dissent. More so, because the veteran NPC leader, Vamuzo, was always in contact with the Congress dissident camp, assuring it of all support and even prize posts if the disgruntled could engineer the fall of Jamir. And it worked. Even as Jamir was disposing off files in his office on 13 May, the dissidents met at the residence of PWD minister Chong-

far as the Speaker was concerned, the former chief minister achieved a significant breakthrough.

At one time, it seemed that the Congress government, after all, would weather the storm. The Speaker, obviously under instructions from Jamir, refused to recognise the 12 defectors as a group. His argument was that the Congress party had expelled two of them—T A Ngullie and Chubatemjen Ao—much before they crossed over. Result: the Speaker disqualified the rest of the ten deserters under the Anti-Defection Act. But Governor Thomas upset all calculations by refusing to accept the Speaker's ruling and invited the ULF to form the government. Said chief minister Chishi: "My government has the



backing of the people Jamir's regime was reeking with corruption and he could not make much of his poll promise to solve the insurgency problem in the state. Moreover, Jamir's government was draining away the treasury and it had run up an overdraft of over Rs 60 crores."

But there are other reasons behind the downfall of Jamir. Many Nagaland observers feel that ethnic considerations and tribal loyalties played a major part in the change of government. All the Sema, Angami and Ao legislators got together to oust Jamir. Though the former chief minister himself belongs to the Ao clan, most of his tribesmen, including heavyweights like Tsuknang Pensu, had fallen out with him.

Jamir's grouse that the Governor did not allow him a chance to prove his majority did not win him sympathy

**S.C. Jamir's grouse that the Governor did not allow him the chance to prove his majority did not win him sympathy. People are yet to forget how he toppled Vizol in 1980**



from even his supporters. For, people are yet to forget how he toppled the United Democratic Front government led by Vizol in 1980 by engineering defections. More recently, in August 1988, the Congress(I) had turned down an appeal by Chishi and Vamuzo for a trial of strength.

The only course left for the Congress now is to challenge the installa-

tion of the Chishi government in court. Whether Rajiv Gandhi and his men opt for this step remains to be seen but what is most disturbing is that defections have come to stay in Nagaland politics. K.L. Chishi may soon become a victim of the ploy he used to unseat S.C. Jamir.

**Santanu Ghosh with Rabijit Choudhury/Kohima**

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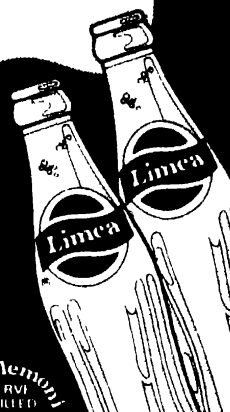


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# A damfool scheme?

*The first round goes to the activists, with the Prime Minister agreeing to review the Narmada project*

**T**he tribals came in hundreds to New Delhi from remote villages travelling for miles in trucks and bullock carts to get to the nearest station to protest against the construction of the Narmada Dam which threatens to take away from them the only homes that they know. Carrying their rations with them, the 1,500 odd men from Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra camped at the Boat Club and sat in daily *dharna* outside the Prime Minister's residence, determined to make their presence felt.

And the barefoot tribals led by Baba Amte and Sunderlal Bahuguna did succeed. Their satyagrah demonstration triggered off an intense debate about the viability of the mammoth project with in the government itself. After insisting that he would meet the protesters only in a small delegation, Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh finally gave in and invited the entire group to his residence. Later, he was forced to give an assurance that the government would begin a dialogue with the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the organisation that is spearheading the agitation.

The Prime Minister's move provoked an intense reaction. An irate Gujarat chief minister, Chimanbhai Patel, hastily summoned a press conference and declared that Narmada

was a matter of life and death for the state. "If a handful of tribals can come and demonstrate at the Boat Club, then so can we. We will also sit on *dharna* at the Boat Club from the 22nd of this month," threatened Patel.

The chief minister did not mince his words. "The Prime Minister had said in all his public meetings in Gujarat before the elections that Narmada would be implemented. Now he can't go back on that," he said, adding that there would be a Gujarat *bachao andolan* if V.P. Singh went back on his word.

Then there were the 28 MPs from three states who wrote to the Prime Minister stating that the Narmada and the Sardar Sarovar projects had not been "adequately assessed for their

social and environmental impacts". Asking the Centre to immediately suspend work on the projects, the MPs said, "We request you to ask the Planning Commission to urgently review these projects from the point of view of assessing their economic, ecological and social viability."

**A**nd there lies the crunch. The Andolan has declared in no uncertain terms that it will not be satisfied with just a review of the rehabilitation and environmental aspects of the dam. "A reassessment of the project is of the utmost importance," said Medha Patkar, who has been working in the Narmada valley for the last five years.

Added Baba Amte, who veered between despair and hope: "The Prime Minister was responsive. But if the government does not agree to a time bound schedule to review the project, then there will be no reason to hope." The Magsaysay award winner, who has now moved to the Narmada valley, described his relationship with the PM as a "love-hate one." "This is a man who spoke to us for one-and-a-half hours when he actually gave us just 15 minutes. Yet, at the same time, he has made us wait in this scorching heat for four days before agreeing to even meet us. Now what do we make of him?"

But V.P. Singh's move has obviously reassured the protesters about the government's intentions. For, the

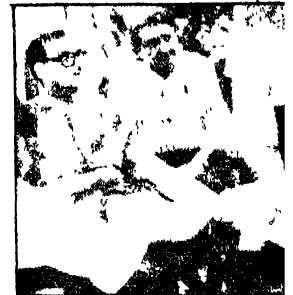
**Baba Amte and Sunderlal Bahuguna at the *dharna* against the Narmada project: an exercise in ecological evangelism**





JAGDISH YADAV

**Members of the Narmada Bachao Andolan: their lives are at stake**



**V.P. Singh and Vinod Pande with Baba Amte: the government reconsiders**

Andolan called off its *dharna* on 19 May, despite initial threats of a fight-to-the-finish. However, the activists maintain that the project would be a disaster for the valley.

The Andolan tirelessly reels out statistics to prove the unviability of the project. The proposed Sardar Sarovar project will submerge 39,134 hectares of land, including 13,744 hectares of forest land and 11,318 hectares of agricultural land. Besides, the sheer magnitude of ecological damage will displace 1,00,000 people (though the official estimate is 66,675). The voluntary organisations, which are opposing the project, point out that there is virtually no rehabilitation scheme. "The state governments have, as yet, been unable to produce a comprehensive and demonstrably feasible rehabilitation plan for even a tenth of this population," they add.

As in the Rs 3,000 crore Tehri Dam project in Uttar Pradesh, the basic problem has been to identify land to resettle the people. The Centre has refused to divert forest land for the purpose. As a result, the Maharashtra government, for instance, has expressed its inability to find enough land to rehabilitate even the first three villages slated for submergence.

Other than the environmental impact and the lack of any sound schemes to rehabilitate the lakhs who will be displaced, critics also question the economic viability of the project. According to the Indian National

Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) "By giving financial approval to the project, the Planning Commission has thrown overboard all economic objectivity and financial discretion."

INTACH argues that the project negates all the objectives laid down in the Seventh Plan - that priority will be given to unfinished projects and that emphasis will be laid on minor irrigation projects which can be completed quickly. (There are 141 major and 433 medium unfinished dam projects in the country.)

Moreover, the escalating costs of the dam, now standing at over Rs 14,000 crores, do not even include essential costs like silting, said critics.

**B**rushing aside all statistics, the pro-dam lobby insists that the project will be the best thing to happen to the country. "The safety, rehabilitation and environment measures incorporated in this project can easily be compared with the best available in the world," an obviously worked-up Chimanbhai Patel said. Supporting him was the chairperson of the Narmada Valley Corporation, C.C. Patel, who said that the project would become a life-line for Gujarat. Quoting the World Bank, he said that the "ratio of beneficiaries to affected persons is better than 200:1".

Caught in the crossfire of conflicting

claims and figures by the pro-dam lobby and the anti-dam environmentalists are the tens of thousands of faceless tribals, for whom the matter means more than just the building of a dam - it is a question of life or death.

As the protesters took over the city, writing "Delhi-ites, Narmada is your concern too", 25-year-old Hukam Chand from Badwa in Madhya Pradesh said, *Bandh bana to jal samadhi bhi hogi Sarkar sun le*. (The government had better beware. We will all drown along with our villages if this dam is to come up.)

Standing next to him was Noraji Kalsia, from Dhulia district in Maharashtra, who had left his 15 acres of agricultural land in his wife's custody. "The government will not be allowed to take our land like this. Anyway, they are not offering us anything in return either," said Kalsia. Illiterate but aware, Kalsia also rattles off figures of how much land will be submerged, how much the project will cost and who will really benefit. "Only the contractor will get anything out of this," he said cynically.

With the affected villagers and environmentalists ganging up and the state governments upset at the unprecedented attention being paid to the activists, the Centre finds itself in a fix. But the government has been playing its cards close to its chest. Who will be the winner, only time will tell. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



# The Congress crumbles

*The party in Kerala faces trouble*

**T**he Congress(I) appears to be fast diminishing as a political force in Kerala. Not so long ago, it was uncertain whether the ruling Marxist-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) would be able to complete a full term in office. But now, the situation in this volatile state has changed so dramatically that political pundits here are predicting that the Marxists could return for another five year term in 1992.

The decline of the Congress(I) is tied to several factors. But, if there is any one reason for the decline, it is the complete bankruptcy of the Congress(I) leadership, both in organisational and ideological terms. Factionalism has paralysed the party organisation, hundreds are defecting to other parties, and there is no strong central message that can today bind the state unit of the Congress(I) to its former United Democratic Front (UDF) allies.

"The Congress(I) is on its deathbed in Kerala," says a former Congress(I) minister. "For the first time we are simultaneously out of power at the Centre and in the state. Added to that, we have lost the will power to challenge the Marxists." The most disturbing aspect of this development is the fact that the 43-year-old secular Congress tradition has, to a large extent, become irrelevant. Result: at the grassroots level, hundreds of Congressmen in the state are signing up with communal organisations like the BJP and the RSS. The growth of the BJP-RSS combine has been so spectacular that political observers feel that it could capture at least one Assembly seat in Kerala in the next state elections. This is highly significant considering that historically the

BJP has never been a force in this state. It has never even managed to get a respectable fraction of the state's total vote. All that is obviously fast changing.

Hastening the process of decline are the squabbling Congress(I) leaders, former chief minister and present leader of the Opposition, K. Karunakaran, and present Kerala Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (KPCC-I) chief A. K. Antony. These two leaders have divided the party into two distinct and antagonistic groups. The feud between the two Congress(I) heavyweights dates back to the early 1970s, when Antony, a young turk of that era, was made the KPCC(I) chief despite strong objections from Karunakaran.

Antony and his camp followers, including men like Vayalar Ravi, K. P. Unnikrishnan, V. M. Sudheeran and Oommen Chandy, had constantly opposed the manipulative politics of Karunakaran. When Mrs. Gandhi imposed the Emergency, Karunakaran, who was at that time home minister in the CPI-led Achuta Menon ministry, became the *de facto* chief minister. After the lifting of the Emergency and the 1977 state Assembly polls, the

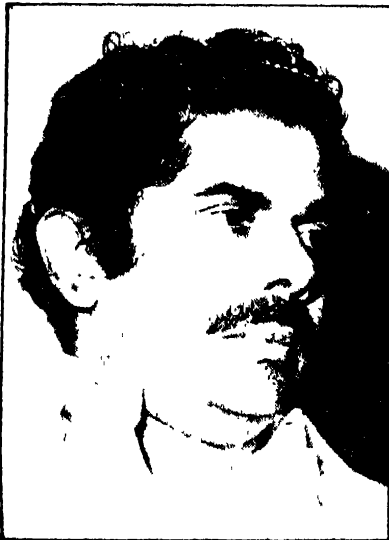


Congress(I) and its allies were swept back to power and Karunakaran became chief minister. But within a month he had to step down following the scandal over the famous Rajan Case and the Kerala High Court judgement pronouncing Karunakaran guilty of perjury.

By a quirk of fate, Antony took over as chief minister, and one of the first things he did on assuming office was to order an enquiry into the Rajan Case. Karunakaran, however, proved to be a fighter and eventually won

the case. Today, sitting in his official residence at Cantonment House in Trivandrum, Karunakaran recalls "Those were the most harrowing days of my life. The entire government machinery was used by the so-called friends of mine to kill me politically. But due to God's grace, I came out unscathed and am still fighting fit."

Later, in 1978, when the Congress(I) broke up, Karunakaran and his followers sided with Mrs. Gandhi while Antony and gang went across to the Congress(S). While Karunakaran remained a follower of the



**Says Vayalar Ravi: "If Karunakaran is given a free hand, he will eat us all and capture the party"**





(From left) Karunakaran addressing a meeting; A.K. Antony leading protesters in Trivandrum: mutual rivalry

Nehru family, Antony turned out to be something of an opportunist. When Mrs Gandhi returned to power, he rejoined the Congress(I), but Mrs Gandhi always remained suspicious of him. Rajiv Gandhi's accession, however, changed things. Antony was taken to Delhi as a Rajya Sabha MP, while Karunakaran was left to rule uninterrupted from 1982 to 1987. After the Congress(I) collapse last year, Rajiv Gandhi despatched Antony to Kerala to beef up the state unit.

This was obviously a blow for Karunakaran. But he kept his counsel and Antony, for all practical purposes, adopted a highly conciliatory stand in the interests of the party. Vayalar Ravi, a state Congress(I) leader bitterly opposed to Karunakaran, says, "Basically Antony was gutless. He should have acted against Karunakaran and nipped him in the bud. It was Antony's Hamlet-like posture that emboldened Karunakaran to hit out at us." And hit out Karunakaran did. He packed important party committees with his own men and in the process debilitated the entire party organisation in Kerala.

The result is open warfare between the two Congress(I) factions. In

many parts of the state, Congressmen belonging to different factions are reported to have engaged in fisticuffs and knife fights. The Youth Congress(I), which was at one time the party's most prestigious and powerful frontal organisations in the state, became ineffectual under the disastrous leadership of Karunakaran appointee, Ramesh Chennithala. The rival, Marxist-controlled Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), in con-

trast, managed to dominate youth politics in the state despite the fact that the establishment was ruled by the Marxists. Chennithala was ultimately packed off to New Delhi but the Youth Congress(I) did not recover and hundreds left to join the RSS.

Factional fighting, too, has intensified. Antony loyalists like Vakkam Purushothaman, MP, M M Hassan, MLA, and others have crossed over to the Karunakaran camp, while two Karunakaran supporters, G Karthikeyan and C V Padmarajan, have defected to the Antony group. For all practical purposes it's a free for all. The two Congress(I) factions are more busy fighting each other than the ruling Marxists. And this is taking its toll. At least three municipalities, which the Congress(I) and its allies had won in the local bodies elections, have recently fallen to the LDF.

Antony and Karunakaran, instead of patching up their differences in view of the party's diminishing clout, have only intensified the fighting. An Antony supporter, Vayalar Ravi, feels "It is now or never—as the organisational elections are coming. If Karunakaran is given a free hand, he will eat us all and capture the organisation. As it is, of the 14 District Congr-

**S**ays Karunakaran:  
"In 1978 they (the  
Antony group) tried to  
finish me off, but I  
came back stronger.  
This time I will swat  
them like flies"



# "My party is alive and kicking"

*KPCC(I) chief A.K. Antony on the prospects of the Congress in Kerala*

**SUNDAY:** There is a feeling that the Congress(I) is on the decline in Kerala and all the agitations that you have launched recently have petered out...

**A.K. Antony:** The parliamentary election results show that the Congress (I) is alive and kicking in Kerala. Our recent agitation against rising prices was a big success. But since we are in the Opposition, both at the Centre and in the state, there is some kind of disillusionment among the party-men, which we feel will evaporate in the coming months.

**Q:** Karunakaran has repeatedly said that the party in Kerala has organisational weakness due to your lacklustre performance as the KPCC(I) president...

**A:** I refuse to be drawn into a controversy as I don't want to start a slanging match. But I welcome criticism and Karunakaran has the right to express his views. I believe in hard work and attaining power through democratic means. The Congress(I) has to work day and night for the next 20 months if we have to win the next parliamentary elections, because there is no shortcut to success. My partymen should not be impatient as I don't expect any miracle to happen overnight.

**Q:** Why have you sidelined your advisors like Oommen Chandy and Vayalar Ravi and preferred a man like Aryadan Mohammed to fight your battle against Karunakaran?

**A:** I will not talk about individuals. But to be fair to Aryadan Mohammed, his intentions have been badly misunderstood by my colleagues.

**Q:** But many people say that of late you have become aggressive and you are trying desperately to shed the image of a timid, shy and indecisive politician...

**A:** I am not aggressive by nature, but I have my own style, which has its negative and positive points. I

believe that words are not important—it is ideas and programmes that makes a leader.

**Q:** Don't you feel that the present infighting within the Congress(I) in Kerala will only help the Marxists to consolidate their position in the state?

**A:** Please note that after 18 years organisational elections are being held in my party. So, it is but natural that various people will form groups. There are hundreds of new leaders waiting to grab party positions from older groups,

Committees in the state, as many as 11 are controlled by Karunakaran's supporters. Last month, Karunakaran brought former Kerala Governor Ram Dulari Sinha as an AICC(I) observer for overseeing the organisational elections. The arrival of Sinha, who is a Karunakaran crony, infuriated Antony.

These developments have so enraged Antony that today he is more determined than ever to finish Karunakaran. "This time I will not dither. It is a fight to the finish," he declared. At a KPCC(I) meeting, he came out openly against Karunakaran, holding him responsible for the sorry state of affairs of the party in the state. At the moment, Antony is touring the state to muster support in his war against Karunakaran. Meanwhile, Karunakaran is also preparing to fight back. "In 1978, they tried to finish me off, but I came back stronger. This time they did everything to finish me off, but I will swat them like flies," says Karunakaran.



who are trying desperately to hold on to their positions. So, individual ambitions might clash. All this is part of the democratic process before elections. But the Congress(I) has an inborn strength to withstand all this. After the elections, the party will stand united in our fight against the Marxists.

**Q:** Will you be able to unseat the Marxists in the next elections?

**A:** We will definitely come back to power in the next elections, but, till then, we have to bury our differences and work very hard to win over the electorate.

## A Congress(I) demonstration in Trivandrum: the party is divided

Such statements might speak volumes for Karunakaran's street-fighting capabilities but it augurs disaster for the state Congress(I). Karunakaran is, however, sanguine. "After we rectify certain organisational weaknesses, the Congress(I) will bounce back to the limelight and I am sure we will win the next elections." But the way things are going, it is unlikely that the Kerala unit of the Congress(I) will be able to get to its feet before the next state polls, leave alone bounce back.

**Sreedhar Pillay/Trivandrum**



# Song of the desert



To fall in love with the desert you have to be born and bred in it. And fed on camel's milk and dates. I was born in one and spent the first six years of my life playing on sand dunes, bathing in brackish rain water collected in *tobhas*, drinking *daachee* (she-camel) milk and going to sleep to the tinkling of bells of camel caravans. It took me quite some time to get used to tropical vegetation without ever getting an uninterrupted view of the horizon. Even now scenes of my desert nativity come to haunt me in my dreams: playing on sand hills in silvery moonlights, sharing *tobhas* with buffaloes with camels lined on the sides taking their three-day ration of water.

People whose notions of beautiful landscapes consist of green mountains, running streams, lakes and forests find it very hard to make terms with deserts. There were odd characters like Lawrence of Arabia, and now we have Suzanne Fisher Staples, whose first novel, *Daughter Of The Wind*, (Julia Mac Rae Books) is based on the Cholistan desert of Pakistan. Lawrence's first love were Arabs (he was a homosexual); the desert he loved because they inhabited it. Staples, after having been UPI correspondent in many Asian countries, was fascinated by the inhospitable wastes of Cholistan and the gypsy tribes which moved camp from one dried up *tobha* to another with their strings of camels. They made their living off camels which they sold at the annual cattle fair at Sibi. They loved them as members of their families and refused to sell them for higher prices offered by Arab and Iranian agents because they slaughtered them for food; or to Afghan Mujahideen who took them to the battle front and exposed them to strafing from the air.

Staples sets her story in the desert bordering on India. Her main characters are a war veteran of the Bahawalpore Army, his son, daughter-in-law and two grand-daughters, Phulan and Shabanu. The narrator is the younger Shabanu. They live in a tumble-down hut close to a *tobha* with their camels

and a pet dog Sher Dil. When sandstorms blow, the *tobha* disappears and they have to trek several days to find another. There is a tribal society, the father's word is law; gypsy must marry gypsy. As in many Muslim families, the preferred alliances are with first cousins. Girls are betrothed before they are ten years old. They are deprived of freedom to roam about and encaged in *chaddars*. As soon as the first tell-tale signs of menstrual blood appear on the girl's *salwar*, preparations for the *nikah* begin to be made. The girl must go to her groom as a virgin. Her virginity and his manliness are displayed publicly after the night of consummation of marriage at a feast *daavat-e-valeema*.

*Daughter Of The Wind* tells of the travails of this small family whose only diversion from the deadly pattern of living among sandy wastes is the jour-

**Sridevi: no to Sri Devi Lal**



ney to Sibi to sell their surplus stock of camels. The two girls are engaged to two brothers. At one deal in Sibi the father makes a lot of money selling his prize stock. He can now afford to give his daughters a handsome dowry. Then he runs into trouble as the *zamindar* to whom the boys' family is indebted casts his evil eyes on the girls they are to marry. He claims the *dreit de signeur*—right of the land-owner to deflower girls of his choice before they marry. In the ensuing fracas, Phulan's husband-to-be is killed. She is promptly given in marriage to the younger brother earlier destined for Shabanu. Meanwhile, the *zamindar* overlord and a bigwig in local politics casts his eyes on Shabanu and proposes to her father that she be allowed to become his fourth wife—he has three in his harem with lots of children. Shabanu's father readily agrees because the alliance will free them forever from uncertain existence. The novel ends with Shabanu riding away into the limitless desert wastes to assert her freedom—almost certain to end with capture and death.

What fascinated me more than the story were the close relations that develop between humans and their camels. They are as touching as the affection that dog lovers have for their pets. The only difference is that while a camel will fully reciprocate love shown towards it, unlike a dog, if maltreated, it will take its revenge. Chastise a camel and there is a good chance that when you come close to it next time, it will crush your skull in its powerful jaws.

## Filmi gossip

After Rekha married the businessman Mukesh Agarwal, her chief rival in the film world, Sridevi, was eager to outdo her. She received a proposal from a handsome business magnate of the name of Mr Lal. Sridevi turned down the proposal without bothering to even look at the man. When asked the reason why she had done so, she replied, "I do not wish to be known as Sri Devi Lal."

(Contributed by V. Shiv Kumar, Delhi) •



# Diamonds and rust

*Will the real Rajiv Gandhi please stand up?*

**I**n 1985, after Rajiv Gandhi won the most staggering mandate in Indian political history, it seemed as though everything had changed. Rajiv, we were told, was Prime Minister of a brave, new India that was hurtling towards the 21st century.

In fact, very little had changed. By 1987, when the Bofors, HDW and Fairfax scandals had taken their toll, the two Aruns had departed and the 21st century had ceased to feature in the Prime Minister's speeches, it became clear that the brave, new India was remarkably similar to the not-so-brave, old India that Rajiv had inherited from his mother.

And by 1989, when the country was ready to vote him out of power, it was obvious that when it came to Rajiv Gandhi, appearance and reality did not always match.

**ODDLY ENOUGH**, if the last two months have proved anything, it is that appearance differs dramatically from reality once again, but this time, the real Rajiv is far more likeable than he may appear.

Publicly, nothing has changed in the Congress(I). The favour-seekers throng 10 Janpath as they used to 7 Race Course Road. The great man's minions bite their tongues to keep from referring to him as PM. The party's MPs still rise in Parliament to make ill-advised interventions castigating the government for assorted sins, both real and imagined. And Rajiv Gandhi appears to believe that he was right, it was the electorate who got it wrong. This scenario—feared incessantly in the media—accurately reflects life in the Congress(I) at one level. What it misses out on is the Rajiv Gandhi factor. Rajiv is an integral part of this scenario and yet, he has less and less to do with it.

Though nobody seems to have noticed, Rajiv Gandhi has been exceptionally silent during the last eight weeks. He has spoken only once or twice in Parliament and then, his interventions have lacked the smug aggression of his speeches during the last session.

Nor has he tried to hog the limelight, make public appearances or address huge rallies. Gone is the Rajiv Gandhi who went to Srinagar and got into arguments

with both Jagmohan and Jaswant Singh. Gone also is the man who made out that he would have solved the Kashmir problem in a matter of days if he was still Prime Minister.

**SO, WHERE** has Rajiv Gandhi been hiding?

Inside himself, mostly.

Friends say that it took two to three months for the reality of the 1989 defeat to sink in. Almost till the moment when the last result was announced, Rajiv believed that the Congress would win the Lok Sabha poll. When it did not, he was incredulous regarding the outcome as some kind of freak or aberration.

It was in this frame of mind that he approached the first session of the new Parliament. His advisers told him that the government could not last more than six months; that with 193 MPs, he led the largest party in the Lok Sabha; and that if he hammered away at V P. Singh's regime, he would almost certainly be able to knock it over.

When this strategy backfired on Rajiv and after the humiliation of the Assembly elections, he began to come to terms with the defeat.

His friends say that not only did he not understand why he had lost in 1989, he still hadn't worked out why he won in 1984. Instead, he had spent much of his term performing on auto-pilot, reacting and responding rather than innovating or initiating. As things began to go wrong, he listened increasingly to those who seemed confident and well-versed in the intricacies of political intrigue.

This approach lost him the election.

**NOW, RAJIV** must decide if he wants to be his own man and less the creature of a coterie of *chamchas* and advisers. Elected because he presented an alternative to the old, discredited politicians, he made the cardinal error of becoming one with those he was meant to replace. He won on a wave of hope and optimism because he promised to deliver change. Perhaps, he did not realise this. But by 1989, he had become what he once opposed.

There is still enormous nostalgia and affection for the Rajiv Gandhi of 1985. But nobody really misses the 1989 avatar. Rajiv has to decide whether he can go

back to the way he once was or whether the events of the intervening years have changed him too drastically.

Indian political history suggests that Oppositions don't win elections: governments lose them. Now that V.P. Singh's honeymoon is over and disillusionment has begun to set in, there is a vacuum that anybody who seems like a credible alternative can fill.

At present, Rajiv Gandhi clearly does not fit the bill. But what if he changed; if he went back to being his own man?

It is a prospect that is guaranteed to give V.P. Singh many sleepless nights. •

**His friends say that not only did he not understand why he had lost in 1989, he still hadn't worked out why he won in 1984. Instead, he had spent much of his term performing on auto-pilot**







# UNPATRIOTIC?

*Tamil Nadu chief minister Karunanidhi indulges in India-bashing*

**M**uthuvel Karunanidhi's logic is simple if Zail Singh could lambast the Indian Army for storming the Golden Temple and the Americans could run down their GIs for what they did in Vietnam, why can't the chief minister of Tamil Nadu fault the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) for its role in Sri Lanka?

The charges against Karunanidhi are endless. The Opposition Congress(I) accuses him of being unpatriotic and anti-national and preaching and supporting separatism. He has been indulging Tamil guerrillas, especially members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who fought against Indian troops. He stayed away from a reception for the IPKF at Madras harbour, at which the Tamil Nadu Governor Dr P C Alexander praised it for its good work. And when Tamil Nadu fishermen were abducted by Tigers off the coast of the state, he justified this by saying that the fishermen were violating Sri Lankan waters.

Karunanidhi, however, remains unfazed by these charges. He maintains that he never meant to show disrespect to his country and the army when he criticised the IPKF, he was only expressing unhappiness at the way in which former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had misused the army.

And what was wrong with expressing his views? Giani Zail Singh, as President of India, was the supreme commander of the armed forces when he condemned Indian soldiers for carrying out Operation Bluestar in June 1984.

As for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK) alleged separatist stance, the Tamil Nadu chief minister claims that it is a thing of the past. His party no longer advocates separatism as it did in the Sixties, nor does it support secessionist groups. But such disclaimers

have not convinced the Congress(I)-All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). It points to recent reports that secessionist elements are active in Tamil Nadu and continue to enjoy state patronage. This allegation may or may not be true, but it cannot be denied that the Karunanidhi government has been extending tacit support to such groups by not objecting to their activities.

But one charge that Karunanidhi definitely cannot deny is being pro-LTTE. Not when Tamil Tigers freely enter Indian waters off the coast of Tamil Nadu and even challenge Indian customs patrol boats. And LTTE toughs abduct Indian fishermen for 'poaching' in Sri Lankan waters.

**T**he Congress(I), of course, has been very vocal about criticising Karunanidhi's stand. It has, in fact, used him to get at the National Front government. Partymen have raised the issue in both Houses of Parliament and attacked the V P. Singh regime for not taking action against the 'anti-India, pro-LTTE' stance of a chief minister.

On 7 May, former Union minister Dinesh Singh of the Congress protested in the Lok Sabha against the increased LTTE activities off the coast of Tamil Nadu. Another MP demanded a statement from Prime Minister

V P. Singh on Karunanidhi's charge that a large number of skeletons were discovered in the camps vacated by the IPKF in Sri Lanka, (a fact, the Tamil Nadu chief minister said, pointed to the genocide of Tamils by the IPKF).

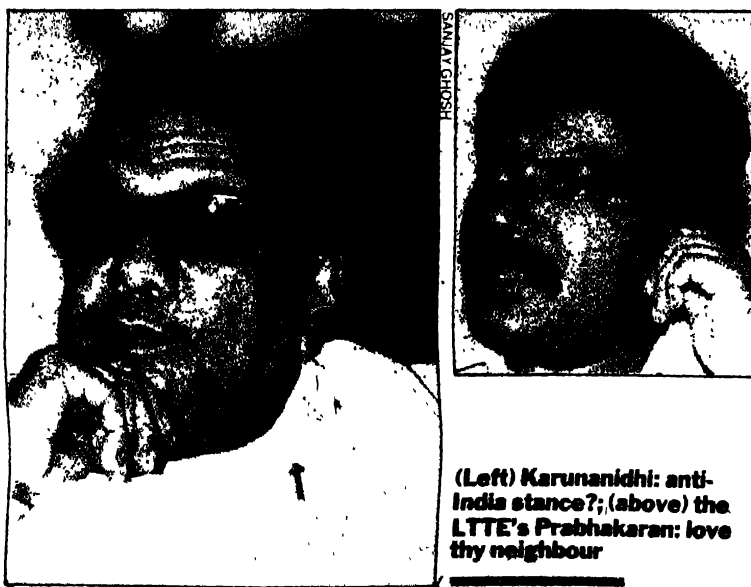
P. Chidambaram, former Union minister of state for home during Rajiv Gandhi's time, wanted to know why the National Front government, in which the DMK is a partner, chose to do nothing about Karunanidhi's anti-IPKF statements, which officers like Lt Gen A S Kalkat, who headed the IPKF, have taken great exception to. In the Rajya Sabha, Congress(I) members, V. Narayanaswamy and Jayanthi Natarajan, warned of the danger to peace in Tamil Nadu "with the LTTE men freely moving about the coast, armed with AK-47 rifles, terrorising the customs and local people".

**P**ublicly, the V P. Singh government could do nothing. Political exigency prevented it from attacking its ally, the DMK. So, it maintained a stoic silence, despite the numerous charges being hurled at Karunanidhi. But privately, it decided to get to the bottom of the matter and investigate the allegations.

In late April, the Union home secretary sent a note to his counterpart

in Tamil Nadu and the director general of police, which said that the LTTE had established links with secessionists in the state and that arms were being smuggled into Tamil Nadu on a large scale. Then on 6 May, the director of the Intelligence Bureau, R.P. Joshi visited Madras to study the LTTE's activities, apparently on the orders of cabinet secretary Vinod Pande.

Embarrassed by the Union home secretary's note, Karunanidhi tried to pass it off as a routine gesture on the part of



(Left) Karunanidhi: anti-India stance?; (above) the LTTE's Prabhakaran: love thy neighbour



the Centre. He told the state Assembly that there was nothing unusual about the central government alerting the state administration about such activities, and should not be construed as a warning "The LTTE is in full control of the North-Eastern Province in Sri Lanka," Karunanidhi pointed out, "so why should they set up camps in our jungles here?"

In fact, the Tamil Nadu chief minister drew attention to the fact that there were as many as 36 training camps for Tamil militants in the state when the late Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi had insisted there were none "The camps were no secret," he said "India

Today magazine even published photographs based on maps they had secured from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)." But, Karunanidhi insisted in the state Assembly, that there were no such camps now, yet he was making no such assertions as Mrs Gandhi had done.

A Congress(I) MLA retorted that even such assertions were anti-India. For, by affirming that Tamil training camps existed in Tamil Nadu in the past, Karunanidhi is only strengthening Colombo's case against India. The Sri Lankan government might even be tempted to complain to the Interna-



NIRMAL MITRA

The IPKF in Sri Lanka: controversial role

tional Court of Justice, the MLA pointed out.

Karunanidhi now blames RAW for trying to create misunderstandings between the DMK and the National Front. On 8 May, he told the state Assembly that he suspected the counter-intelligence agency to be behind most of the press reports suggesting that he was siding with the Tigers, who posed a threat to the law and order situation in the state. Earlier, the RAW had tried to generate hostility between various Tamil groups in Sri Lanka, he said, and now, it was trying to create a rift between the Tamil Nadu and central governments.

Whether the RAW is on his side or not, the press certainly is not. Newspapers have blown up the issue into a major controversy, say DMK supporters. "They will sensationalise anything," says one. But it is true that both the Tamil Nadu and national newspapers have been highlighting Karunanidhi's 'anti-patriotic' stance.

One newspaper referred to a confidential report sent by the state's Governor Dr P. C. Alexander to the Union home ministry, drawing its attention to the trend towards militance and secessionism in the state, and pointed out that the DMK was not doing enough to check it. Another

alleged that the LTTE was training DMK cadres, a fact that the chief minister vehemently denied. The only political activity that the LTTE has engaged in Tamil Nadu, was promoting the cause of Eelam, said Karunanidhi.

But nobody, it seems, will take him at his word. Not even the V.P. Singh government—even though it chooses not to come out against Karunanidhi in public. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/ Madras**

## CONGRESS(I) REACTIONS



RAJESH KUMAR

**Dinesh Singh** protested against increased LTTE activities off the Tamil Nadu coast



CAULAMPATOLE

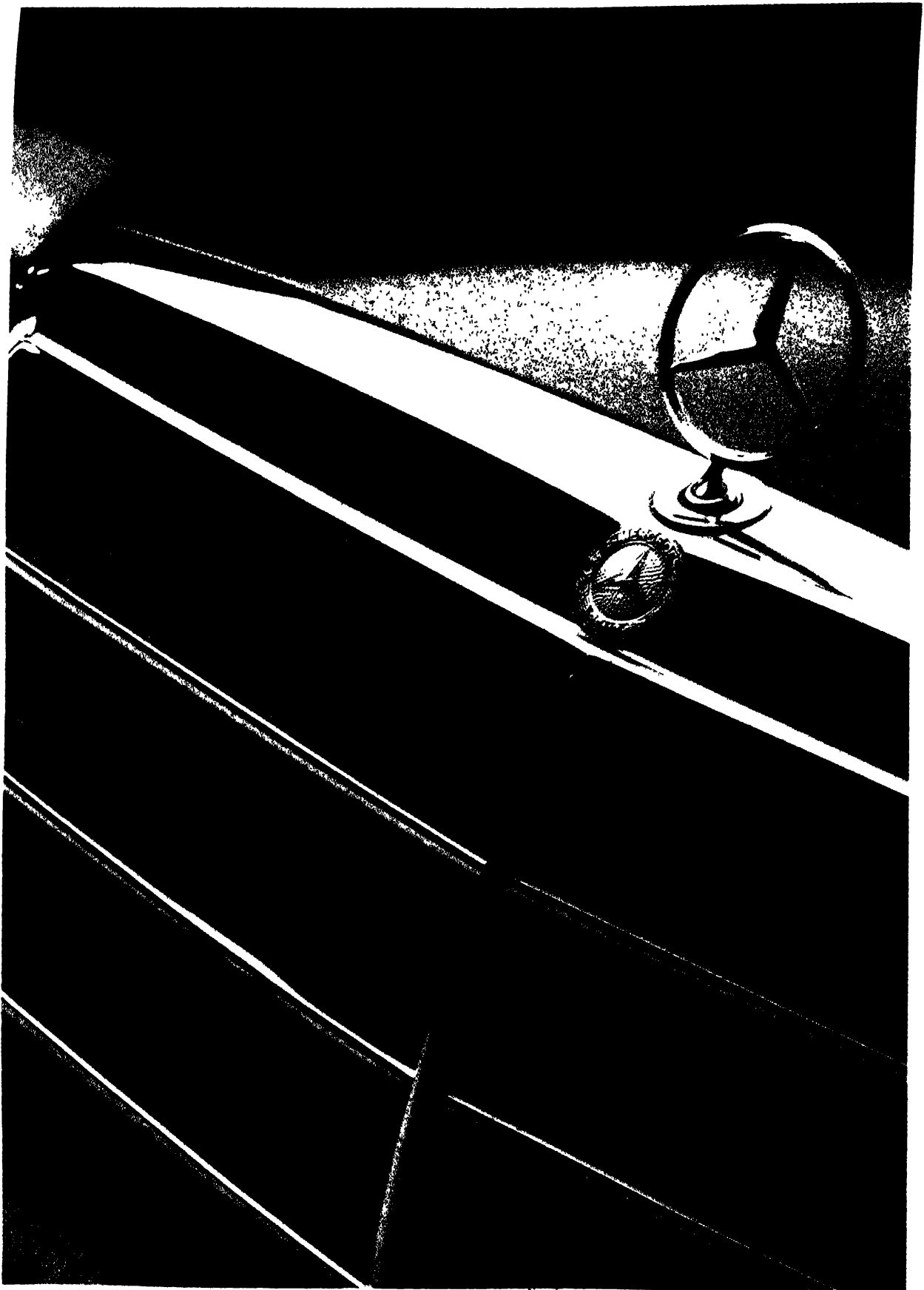
**Jayanthi Natarajan** warned of the danger of having Tigers roaming freely in the state



CAULAMPATOLE

**P. Chidambaram** wanted to know why the NF chose to do nothing about the CM's stand









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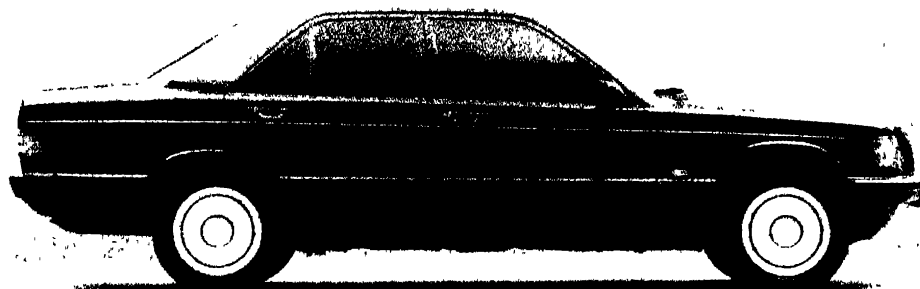
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# Shadow-boxing

*Nobody really knows how to tackle the ULFA menace—but all blame the AGP*

**T**he four-and-a-half year old Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government of Assam is caught between the devil and the deep sea. On one side it has the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a secessionist and underground organisation of armed militants, and, on the other, the Union government, which has held out veiled threats of intervening in Assam, if the state government failed to contain the ULFA. The militants, who are demanding a sovereign state of Assam, have entrenched themselves in the Brahmaputra valley and have struck terror among businessmen by extorting money and carrying out selective killings. But it was in April that the ULFA shot into national prominence after it allegedly gunned down business tycoon Surrendra Paul.

Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed went on a two-day visit to Assam (5-6 May) to take part in a meeting of the Committee of Ministers for the Economic Development of the North-eastern Region, but his real concern was the law and order situation in the state. During his stay, the Mufti told chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his Cabinet colleagues that the Centre viewed the situation—arising out of the ULFA's growing influence—to be alarming. He wanted the state government to act firmly, and immediately. Moreover, the Mufti did not stop at that. He called a meeting of senior government officials and discussed with them the ways of toning up the law and order machinery and went on to make suggestions that could—if the state government chose to—be interpreted as the Centre's interference in matters that were strictly the state's responsibility.



**MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED**

*Advocating a tough stand. Wants the state government to act fast.*

Some of the countermeasures Mufti Mohammad Sayeed proposed to tackle the ULFA included:

- Setting up grievance committees, comprising prominent citizens in the affected districts.
- Mobilisation of youths to politically defuse the "fear psychosis"

- Identification of people in the state administration who are supporting the extremists.

- Mobilising the members of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to campaign against the ULFA.

- And the holding of another all-party meeting (the previous one was held in March) to work out an action plan to fight terrorism.

The Mufti had his own reasons for upbraiding the AGP government, a constituent of the National Front (NF), in closed-door discussions, though he gave it a clean chit in press conferences held in Guwahati. The Mufti's hands are already full with an uprising in Kashmir and unabating terrorism in Punjab. Another insurgency gaining momentum in the sensitive plains of Assam at this point of time would be disastrous for the Mufti's reputation. He has the Congress(I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to contend with in Parliament. While the Opposition has persistently demanded the dismissal of the AGP government, primarily to embarrass the National Front, the BJP, which is committed to upholding the interests of the business community in Assam, has raised similar demands, despite being an ally of the NF at the national level.



**PRAFULLA KUMAR MAHANTA**

*Has to delicately negotiate the problem posed by the ULFA. Needs to take action, immediately.*

**T**he surest way for Mufti Mohammad Sayeed to commit political hara-kiri would be to succumb to political pressure and recommend President's Rule in the state. Observers in the state feel that the problem posed by the ULFA is socio-political in nature and any attempt to dislodge the government would only widen the emotional gap that already exists between the Assamese and the rest of India. "President's Rule will only



make things worse. The AGP, the AASU and the ULFA would then merge and make the problem insurmountable," says former chief minister and the state Janata Dal chief Golap Borbora. Agrees Hiteswar Saikia, president of the Assam Pradesh Congress(I) committee and former chief minister. "President's Rule will not be able to deliver the goods."

While the Mufti has ruled out negotiations with the ULFA, so long as they continue to wield the gun and demand a sovereign state of Assam, political leaders in the state are not quite sure of the rationale behind the pre-condition. The Mufti's recommendations indicate that the Centre's assessment of the situation in the state is based on the belief that the AGP government will bend over backwards to toe the line it lays down. Moreover, it also assumes that ULFA extremists are thriving on a fear psychosis. State political leaders, however, suggest that the ULFA enjoys the people's support at the grassroots level and has the sympathies of a section of the Assamese intelligentsia. Even the tribals such as the Bodos and the Karbis do not see the ULFA in the same light as the National parties do and the state's fairly large Bengali population—Hindus and Muslims alike—are hesitant to buy the idea that the ULFA activists are merely a bunch of gun-toting criminals.

The fact is that in upper Assam, the ULFA, together with its frontal organisation, the Asom Jatiya Unnayan Parishad (AJUP), has launched popular programmes such as the building of roads, setting up of libraries, introduction of collective and modern techniques of farming; it is closing down liquor vends and video parlours, holding public trials and punishing people for both minor and serious offences. To generate employment, it is encouraging handicrafts and cottage industries, and is trying to resuscitate traditional art forms to bring about a cultural revival. All this has made the ULFA a household name in the villages, where its activists move about freely and virtually run a parallel administration that has, in many ways, become more acceptable to the people than the government machinery.

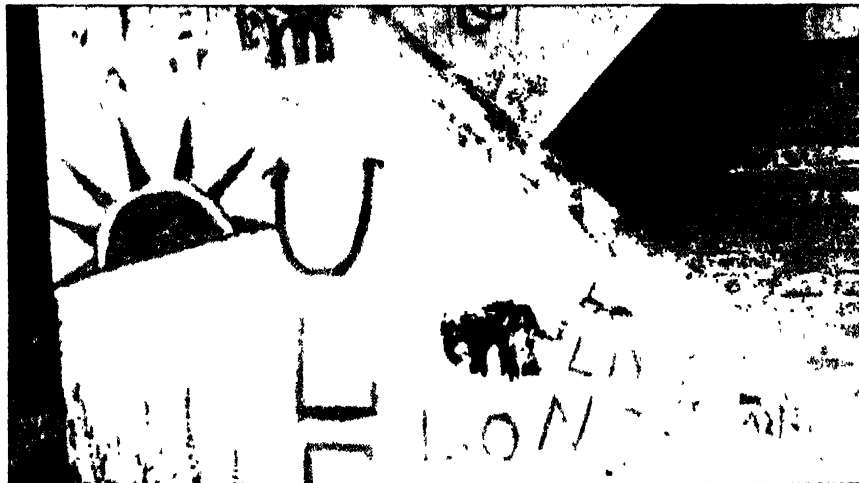
It is because of this undercurrent of popular sympathy that no political party is prepared to denounce the ULFA categorically and all seem to be ambivalent in their attitude towards

the organisation. Most political leaders including Saikia, and the state unit of the BJP, suggest that the AGP should immediately begin a dialogue with the ULFA, though nobody seems to have any concrete plan of action to offer. They all blame the AGP for having let the ULFA grow, but in the same breath add that the problem cannot be solved by strongarm administrative measures.

What is interesting, if not intriguing, is that while the Congress(I) high command is stridently demanding tough measures against the ULFA, Hiteswar Saikia strikes a distinctly different note. When asked to comment on the activities of the militants, the APCC(I) chief told SUNDAY in an interview on 8 May: "There is no point in condemning the ULFA simply because it is resorting to violence. The

unit has, while criticising the ULFA's secessionist stand, advocated the holding of talks with the organisation, and without any preconditions, if necessary.

But no matter what the state units of the two parties might say, both the Congress(I) and the BJP high command have been consistently attacking Mahanta for having failed to protect the lives and property of Assam's Hindi-speaking people. But there is no way the ULFA can be faulted for being paranoid against any community. According to police and political sources, the ULFA has killed 94 people since its inception 10 years ago. A few more killings, including that of Surrendra Paul, for which the ULFA has not claimed responsibility, have also been attributed to the organisation. But of the 94 confirmed ULFA



ULFA GRAFFITI

*The organisation has become a household name in upper Assam*

Russian and Chinese revolutions—both violent phases in history—were hailed by all progressive people. More recently, the mob frenzy that led to the assassination of Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu and the formation of a new government in the streets of Bucharest, has been welcomed by the whole world. The ULFA's activities must also be seen in that light—as a form of protest.

Like the Assam Congress(I), the state unit of the BJP, too, takes a stand that does not strictly conform to the thinking of the party's central leadership. In a paper on the Assam problem, the BJP's state unit has attributed the rise of the ULFA to the state's economic deprivation and has urged the Centre to take measures to heal the Assamese psyche. What is more significant is that the local party

victims, 73 are said to be Assamese. Argues a senior AGP leader: "When the majority of the victims are Assamese, the charge that the Hindi-speaking community is under any special threat does not hold water."

The discernible pattern in the ULFA's operations is that it is striking at a class rather than at any community. According to Golam Osmani, leader of the United Minorities Front (UMF), which champions the cause of the Muslims and the Bengali Hindus: "They (the activities of the ULFA) are directed against big businessmen and not the minorities." This class-orientation in the ULFA's strategy is probably what endears it to the Communist Party of India (CPI). In a statement issued on 10 May, the state unit of the CPI said: "The ULFA has declared its objective as the establish-



ment of scientific socialism in Assam." The statement added: "The ULFA has also raised certain political issues which need serious consideration."

The state government should initiate talks with the ULFA without any precondition."

Likewise, the Naxalites, belonging to the Vinod Mishra faction, look upon the ULFA as a fraternal force, though they do not support its secessionist demand. In fact, the CPI(ML) has declared that it is not averse to joint programmes with the ULFA in its struggle against the Indian ruling classes.

The CPI(M), however, takes a more cautious view. Nandadulal Talukdar, secretary of the CPI(M)'s state secretariat, told SUNDAY that his party was against terrorism and did not approve of the ULFA's activities. But even Talukdar's criticism was not without qualifications. He felt that the exploitation of Assam by the capitalists, the backwardness of the region, rising unemployment and the failure of the AGP government to fulfil its promises have forced a section of the Assamese youths on the path of terrorism.

Janata Dal's Golap Borbora, too, feels that the AGP's non-performance on the economic and social fronts has created conditions favourable for the ULFA. In a state with little or no developmental activities, militants with populist programmes are likely to win the people's sympathy, he feels. Though he does not suggest an all-out administrative offensive against the ULFA, Borbora nevertheless feels that the AGP must act against individuals involved in terrorism and also improve the state's economic profile. "You must show the stick first before you dangle the carrot," he says.

**W**hile national political parties, including the BJP, tend to be hesitant in their approach to the ULFA, important regional forces seem to be sympathetic, if not partisan, in their attitude.

After the visit of the Union home minister, who has committed the Centre and the state government to a hardline stand by declaring that the ULFA must abjure violence before talks can begin, the AGP executive met on 9 May and came out strongly against the militants. Home minister Bhriku Kumar Phukan told SUNDAY on 12 May that 15 battalions of central security forces have already arrived in Assam and that the state administra-

## **The ULFA has more friends than enemies and enjoys considerable manoeuvrability. But the government seems to be running out of options**

tion has been ordered to step up anti-ULFA operations. "We are confident of defusing the situation. The police has been told to make arrests whenever cases are reported," says Phukan.

But does the state police have the will to fight the ULFA? Claims an MLA "Assamese police officers have confided in me that the state force is reluctant to take on the ULFA." Moreover, an important AGP leader makes no bones about his party's links with the extremists. "They took part in the Assam agitation, many of their leaders are known to us, and there is

no point in denying that local AGP leaders and workers often intervene when ULFA activists are arrested."

"Why blame the AGP alone," added the leader, who refused to be named. "The intellectuals have not so far uttered a word against the ULFA, the vice-chancellor of Guwahati University shielded them when the police went to make arrests some time back, the Assam Sahitya Sabha gave recognition to the ULFA by allowing it to put up buntings in one of its seminars," he revealed. Will all this sympathy disappear overnight simply because the Centre and the state government cry "out damned spot" every time they see the ULFA on the map of Assam?

Add to this underlying nexus, the soft-corner that the AASU, the Bodos, and the Karbis have for the extremists, and the balance tilts decisively in favour of the ULFA. AASU president Atul Bora and general secretary Samujjal Bhattacharya vehemently deny that the student body has any links with the ULFA but they sympathise with the militants nevertheless. "The root cause behind the rise of the ULFA must be identified," emphasises Bhattacharya, while Bora feels that

### **ULFA GUERRILLAS**

*They have launched developmental schemes in the countryside*

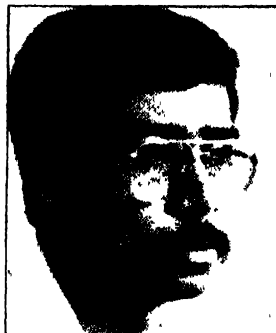




the sense of alienation—shared by most Assamese—arising from economic deprivation and demographic distortions must be removed, if the extremists are to be tackled. "It is not a law and order issue and repressive measures will not help," cautions Bora. The AASU wants the government to bring the ULFA to the negotiating table and find a solution through peaceful means.

The Bodos, who are at the receiving end of the AGP's repressive measures, because of the ABSU's (All Bodo Students Union) demand for a separate Bodo state, would tactically side with the ULFA as long as it remains a thorn in the AGP's flesh. B K Basumatary, MLA and chairman of the United Tribal National Liberation Front (UTNLF), feels that the ULFA, despite being predominantly Assamese in its composition, has done nothing brazenly anti-Bodo so far. In fact, he points out that one of the key persons responsible for organising a Bodo massacre last year has been executed by the ULFA. Moreover, the ULFA has sent feelers to the ABSU, and if the two organisations arrive at an understanding, the ULFA will be able to check the government's moves.

If Basumatary reflects the thinking of a section of the Bodos, Dr Jayanta Rangpi, chief executive of the Karbi Anglong district council and a leader



(L to R) PHUKAN, SAIKIA AND BORBORA

*Most leaders say that dialogues should begin, but few have any concrete plan of action to offer*

of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), feels that the ULFA's agitation has a number of positive aspects to it. First, Rangpi feels that, unlike the Assam movement, the ULFA's activities are not directed against any particular community. Secondly, it is striking at rapacious businessmen who form the social base of the BJP in the state. And, finally, it has shaken the big tea companies which earn crores of rupees from Assam but do not plough back the profits.

**A**t this juncture, the ULFA appears to have more friends than enemies. While the ULFA enjoys considerable leeway and manoeuvrability even in respect of its fundamental demand of a sovereign Assam (which seems to be an unrealistic dream at the moment), the central and the state governments suddenly find themselves running out of options after having taken the people for granted during the last 40 years.

While the Assamese have grown increasingly suspicious of Delhi's commitment to the development of the state and the solution of its demographic problems, the democratic options have been systematically frittered away by the Centre and the state. When national political parties became redundant in the late Seventies and the early Eighties under Assam's highly regional and nativist political compulsions, the leaders of the Assam movement had emerged as the only alternative.

"But they have failed to deliver. The present AGP leaders betrayed the movement by entering into a pact with the Centre in 1985. None of the problems against which the movement

was launched has been solved. The AGP leaders have, as a result, lost their credibility and there is a political vacuum in the state," says Nibaran Bora, a former socialist and a friend of railway minister George Fernandes. He also chides the National Front: "If the new government was serious about solving the problems of Assam, it would not have appointed Devi Lal—a man who has no notion of the complexities of the state as someone in-charge of the northeast."

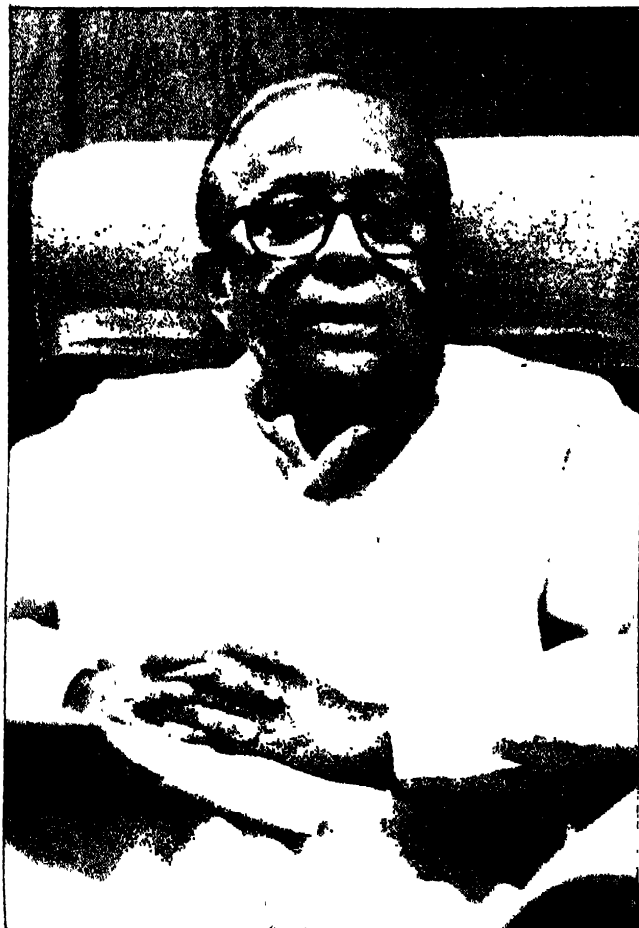
With the business and the industrial lobby sending out frantic SOS signals, the Centre has decided to use the AGP as its cat's paw in stabilising the situation in Assam, but faces a Hobson's choice. If it deploys the security forces to flush out the ULFA activists, atrocities are bound to be committed on innocent people. If it allows the situation to drift, the ULFA will further consolidate itself. There is a third, and a more covert, option, however, by which the Centre and the AGP could tame the ULFA: they might sponsor ethnic groups to communalise the issue and run down the militants. And that process may have already begun: a number of tribal outfits such as those of the Mishings, the Ahoms, and the Tribal Volunteer Force have mushroomed in the recent past as counterpoise to the ULFA. But whatever the strategy the Centre may adopt, the politics of Assam is sure to become explosive in the six months before the Assembly elections due in December this year.

The time, it seems, has come when the Centre must pay a price for its past sins and the Mufti is likely to become the villain of the piece—due to no real fault of his own though—in a highly complex and surcharged political drama. ●

**Anish Gupta/Guwahati**







ASHOK MAZUMDAR

## STRENGTHS

- At a time when all politicians are suspect in the eyes of the people, Jyoti Basu is perhaps the only leader who enjoys a high credibility and an impeccable image.
- He controls a sizeable number of members in Parliament—at least 26. This is a crucial factor now that no single party has an absolute majority in Parliament.
- Jyoti Basu has complete control over the powerful unit of the CPI(M) in West Bengal.
- The West Bengal chief minister is gifted with a rare political foresight. He predicted the downfall of the Congress(I) as early as in 1988 and pressed for Opposition unity. He could even gauge that the BJP would emerge as a major political force and urged Opposition leaders to go along with the BJP to oust the Congress from the Centre.
- Basu is the symbol of the Indian left. And nobody within the CPI(M) has either the charisma or the clout to upstage him.
- Since Jyoti Basu played a key role in the installation of V.P. Singh as the Prime Minister, he has the power to pull him down.

# THE MARXIST

*November 1987: Darjeeling was in flames. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu had rushed to New Delhi to meet the Prime Minister. A prior appointment had been fixed and Basu had been told the PM would meet him on 16 November. On the promised day, Basu first met the then home minister Buta Singh and then a few other central ministers. But there was no call from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which was supposed to have given him the exact time of the meeting. The next day, too, there was no word from the PMO. And after waiting the whole day, Basu took the late evening flight back to Calcutta. It was a quiet departure. But Basu had been humiliated. Here was a chief minister who could not even meet the PM.*

## *West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu emerges as the new power-centre in Delhi*

*April 1990: The Gorkhaland problem has long been resolved. The mood in West Bengal is upbeat as industrialists are finally talking about investing in the state. And the Left Front seems set to rule the state for ever. Chief minister Jyoti Basu flies to Delhi to attend a*

*three-day CPI(M) politburo meeting. On the last day of the meeting, he calls up the PMO. A few hours later, he is lunching with the Prime Minister. Later that afternoon, Basu drops in at the finance ministry to meet finance minister Madhu Dandavate to talk about the many things he wants done. Dandavate assures him they will be done. In the evening, Basu holds a press conference to assure everyone that the government is secure and that it has the unconditional support of the left. After that he drives down to the airport with an official escort, passes through the VIP gate and directly boards a giant Airbus 300, waiting to take off for Calcutta. It is a quiet departure. But as Basu sits back to tighten his seat belt, he cannot but retrospect with a certain satisfaction.*



## WEAKNESSES

- Despite his clout, Jyoti Basu is not the undisputed leader of the left parties. Within his own party—the CPI(M)—too, Basu's power to take decisions has been largely circumscribed by the politburo.
- He lacks a national image. He is largely a regional leader promoting regional interests. Though Basu is a front-ranking leader of the CPI(M), he does not have much say in the affairs of the party in Kerala, where the Marxists are ruling. He is completely dependent on his party base in Bengal.
- Since communism no longer holds much appeal for large sections of the people, Basu and his comrades have not been able to make much headway. Moreover, the CPI(M) has not been able to come up with radically new slogans to woo the masses.
- Although the left parties collectively have a respectable number of MPs, their number is not decisive. In the event of a realignment of political forces at the national level, Basu and the left could well be left out in the cold.

ASHOKE CHAKRABORTY



# KINGMAKER

**T**he wheel has indeed turned. Jyoti Basu's air-conditioned office in Calcutta's monsoon-stained Writers' Buildings is no longer the cubby-hole of a provincial satrap. It is a power-centre whose influence stretches 1,300 kilometres away, where national policies are made and decisions taken. The days of Basu as a mere chief minister are over. Events, circumstances and consummate political skill have thrust Basu, in his September years, to a position of unparalleled power in the country. He is the new kingmaker, the *bhadrak* in his impeccably starched *dhoti*, leaving behind the tramlined streets and transcending *panchayat* politics to meddle for the first time in affairs that could shape the future of the nation.

Among the first people to recognise the new power-centre are the country's industrialists, who are congregating to pay their respects. A 'line' to Jyoti Basu has become a must for all serious players in the Indian corporate scene. A phone call from Jyoti Basu to any ministry today is as much of an order as one from deputy prime minister Devi Lal or Chandra Shekhar. Even those industrialists who have no plans to invest in Bengal are making sure that they establish good relations with the chief minister.

In New Delhi, Basu is treated on par with the new set of rulers. Not just appointments, but demands too are honoured. The ease with which the long-overdue Rs 3,000-crore Haldia petrochemical project and the Soviet credit for the Bakreshwar power plant

were cleared is proof of Basu's new-found clout. The Centre has approved several other smaller ventures, including a Rs 150-crore electronic telephone equipment manufacturing project, a Mahanagar Nigam for Calcutta telephones and a major Reliance polyester filament yarn project. Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh has promised speedy decisions on a number of other matters including the setting up of an Inter-States Council demanded by Basu to sort out Centre-state problems.

The importance of being Basu was apparent even before the election of the National Front government. At that time, both the Congress(I) and the Opposition had realised that there was a strong possibility of neither group emerging as the single largest



# The communist and the capitalist

*The Basu-Ambani friendship seems to have survived even after Haldia*

**I**s Jyoti Basu trying to bail out the Ambanis? This intriguing question has become a matter of endless speculation in West Bengal. Basu has, however, succeeded in sidestepping the issue every time it has been raised. On 10 May this year, when a Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) MLA, Debaprasad Sarkar, raised the matter in the state Assembly, the chief minister replied that the question of the Left Front government giving economic and political rehabilitation to the

Ambanis and has indirectly tried to help them out on a few occasions. While these charges are still unsubstantiated, there can be no denying that Jyoti Basu and Dhirubhai Ambani do have warm relations.

This started sometime last year when Dhirubhai sent a message to Basu requesting a meeting. The two men met in Delhi at Dhirubhai's Taj Mahal Hotel (Man Singh Road) suite for dinner. People close to the Ambanis say that the two men got along well.

Thereafter, Mukesh Ambani arrived in Calcutta with a proposal to implement the main cracker unit of the Haldia petrochemical complex. R.P. Goenka, the original promoter, was furious and felt that the Ambanis had done him out of the project. As it turned out, a number of industrialists, including Rahul Bajaj, Viren



**Dhirubhai Ambani with Jyoti Basu: a powerful benefactor?**

Shah, the Mittals, etc., came sniffing for a share of the Haldia cake and, eventually, not the Ambanis but the Tata's Darbari Seth got the contract.

But the Basu-Ambani friendship obviously survived Haldia. The Ambanis agreed to move into Bankura with a filament yarn project when one of the Birlas backed out. The two men met again during veteran CPI(M) leader B.T. Ranadive's funeral in Bombay. It was during this meeting that Ambani is reported to have requested Basu to put in a good word with V.P. Singh on the Larsen & Toubro case. Ambani, reportedly, said he was willing to step down from the L&T board but he did not want to be humiliated by the government. Thereafter, Basu is said to have taken this compromise formula to V.P. Singh and got it accepted.

Union finance ministry officials are of the view that there is more to the Basu-Ambani relationship. They say that the Bengal chief minister is distinctly soft on the

party in the Lok Sabha. In such a scenario, every Prime Minister apparent had calculated that the left with its 40-odd assured Lok Sabha seats could play a crucial role. Even Rajiv Gandhi, who had time and again humiliated Basu, began wooing the *bhadralok* communist. It is quite another thing that Rajiv was a little too late—the Indian political scene might have been quite different if Rajiv Gandhi's judgement of Basu had been a little more astute. At any rate, it was V.P. Singh, who most strenuously courted the 'old man' from West Bengal.

V.P. Singh, in retrospect, had judged brilliantly. This was obvious the moment the election results began pouring in. The Congress(I) was losing but the National Front was not winning. The popular verdict was ambiguous. It could at best be interpreted as a popular vote for the Opposition in general, and not for any one opposition group. The National Front consequently emerged as a minority with 150-odd seats. The BJP with its 88 seats became a powerful Opposition factor. Within the National Front, in particular the Janata Dal, there were powerful undercurrents of rivalry. Devi Lal, with his BJP friends, toyed with the heady idea of being Prime Minister. So did the Thakur MP from Ballia, Chandra Shekhar.

Basu was in Calcutta when the agency tickers and Prannoy Roy's TV bulletins were flashing news of the poll results. Even before the counting was over, he began receiving frantic messages from Vishwanath Pratap Singh, requesting his presence in New Delhi. On 27 November, Basu flew to New Delhi. When newsmen mobbed him at Calcutta airport, the chief minister was non-committal and insisted that any decision on the new government would have to be taken by his party, the CPI(M), as a whole. But Basu had secretly made up his mind. He wanted V.P. Singh and nobody else.

At the time the Delhi police's special branch was beginning to position policemen at the previously unguarded National Front office near Kanishka Hotel, Basu was huddled with senior CPI(M) and National Front leaders discussing tactics. V.P. Singh also dropped in at the CPI(M) office before proceeding to BJP president L.K. Advani's house for discussions. At that time, no one was sure who would be PM. Many felt that the obvious choice was the old Jat from Haryana, Devi Lal, who had the sup-





**E**vents, circumstances and political skill have thrust Basu, in his September years, to a position of unparalleled power in the country

port of the BJP but was a man with little experience of running the central government. It was at this juncture that Basu stepped in. He met Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar and put forward the thesis that V.P. Singh was the only leader with a national image—and, at any rate, the only leader the left was prepared to support. Devi Lal saw reason but Chandra Shekhar did not. Vishwanath Pratap Singh, all the same, became Prime Minister. Rajiv Gandhi had to bow out from the Delhi durbar. Basu had won his first victory.

**D**ecember 1989 will remain a watershed in Jyoti Basu's life. the high point of a tortuous political career that has spanned more than four long decades. And Basu has fought, manoeuvred and trudged all the way. In many ways, it has been a remarkable journey—from very petty bourgeois beginnings, schooling in Calcutta's St Xavier's College and training as a barrister in the Inns of London. Basu learnt his Marxism in England under the tutelage of Krishna Menon and others. That finished his legal career and pushed him into the tumult of West Bengal politics. Basu and the late Ratan Lal Brahmin from Darjeeling were the first two communist MLAs to be elected to the state Assembly, dominated in those days by the legendary Congress chief minister Dr B.C. Roy.

In the 1950s, Basu was the sole voice of Opposition in Bengal politics.

The thin, bespectacled barrister-turned-communist acquired a stature well beyond his actual standing in the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) of those years. Even at that time, Basu was something of an anomaly. He clearly revelled in parliamentary democracy, understood the system and did not seem to believe that objective conditions in the country called for armed insurrection or that radical change could be achieved by appropriating the propertied classes. His views were regarded with a great deal of suspicion within his

#### Basu with Vajpayee: an uneasy alliance

TARAPADA BANERJEE



party. But he was not an establishment man. He sided with the CPI faction which was more pro-China and, along with the late Pramode Dasgupta and others, broke away from the parent party in 1964 to form the Communist Party of India (Marxists) CPI(M).

The division of the Communist Party gave a fillip to Basu's career. At one time, a powerful faction had wanted to sideline, if not expel, Basu from the party, but by the mid-1960s, the 'parliamentary' communist had become indispensable for the party. He was the human face of the party, the *bhadralok* acceptable to the articulate and politically aggressive middle class Bengalis. He was no rabble-rouser, no trade union tyrant or conspiratorial clerk soaked in Marxism-Leninism, determined to exterminate capitalists and every man of property. On the contrary, Basu was always civilised; he was also quintessentially Bengali, complete with spotless *dhori* and a scrubbed middle class air. People were prepared to listen to this communist because he directed his anger against the injustices of the Centre, the Congress and the entrenched, unresponsive establishment. He did not talk about hanging the evil capitalists or bringing down the system, at least at the present historical juncture.

In retrospect, Basu and his powerful CPI(M) comrades had begun articulating a very real, deep-seated but largely unspoken Bengali grouse. But



# The Congress(I) connection

*Rajiv Gandhi continues to woo Jyoti Basu*

**W**est Bengal Congressmen are convinced that their leader, Rajiv Gandhi, is still trying to win over Jyoti Basu and is maintaining links with him. Otherwise, the Congressmen argue, nothing can explain why Rajiv Gandhi is not keen on taking on the Marxists in Bengal. He has almost deliberately let the Bengal unit of his party drift without direction. While A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury remains the president of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (WBPCC-I), he has no real power. Rajiv Gandhi seems neither interested in backing Ghani Khan nor in appointing an effective, authoritative chief of the Bengal unit.

Privately, Bengal Congress(I) leaders disclose that Basu and Rajiv Gandhi have secretly conferred in recent days. Apart from face-to-face meetings, Basu is believed to have several channels to the Congress(I) leadership. One of them is CPI(M) politburo member Harkishen Singh Surjeet, who has extremely cordial relations with former AICC(I) general secretary K.N. Singh (who, incidentally, was a communist in his youth). Jyoti Basu's entrepreneur son is also reported to be friends with Buta Singh's son and with Maharashtra chief minister Sharad Pawar. Chandan Basu is preparing to set up a small industrial unit in Maharashtra and Pawar has been instrumental in getting it cleared.

Rajiv Gandhi's reason behind wooing Basu is fairly simple. He knows that the National Front government under Prime Minister V.P. Singh is tottery and is bound to collapse if the communists led by Basu withdraw their support. The Congress(I) leadership also believes that Basu is more than a little disappointed with V.P. Singh and could decide to pull the rug from

under the Prime Minister's feet. On the other hand, Jyoti Basu too knows that V.P. Singh depends on him and perhaps by skillfully playing the Congress(I) card, he could extract far greater concessions from the Centre.

At the same time, Basu does not have great personal regard for Rajiv Gandhi. The Bengal chief minister has, perhaps, never forgotten Rajiv Gandhi's intemperate remarks during the 1987 West Bengal election campaign, when the then Prime Minister had derisively referred to the Marxist chief minister as an "old man" fit only for retirement. Basu had angrily retorted that he would see that Rajiv Gandhi retired before him. And that is exactly the way it has turned out. Rajiv Gandhi had seriously underestimated the power and doggedness of Bengal's charismatic communist.

However, Basu is an astute politician who does not believe in letting personal dislikes cloud objective judgements. He is prepared to play ball up to a point—just like he did before the 1989 general elections.

As it turned out, Basu played along but did not fall for Rajiv Gandhi's synthetic charm. Basu knew he had far more to gain by supporting the National Front at a time when the national mood was distinctly anti-Congress(I). Today, Basu knows he holds a trump card. But he is not going to play it in a hurry. Even Prime Minister V.P. Singh would do well to match Jyoti Basu and not take him for granted.

their course was moderate. Unlike the faction led by people like Charu Mazumdar, who broke away in the late 1960s to launch the Naxalite movement under the banner of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), CPI-ML, Basu felt that the Indian state was too strong to be taken head on. He appears to have favoured the acquisition of power through electoral coups, tactical alliances and covert infiltration of all vital institutions, including the police, the judiciary and the government. As it turned out, Basu's method prevailed. The radicals—the Naxalites—were wiped out. And when the CPI(M) and its Left Front allies were swept into power in 1977, Basu was the natural choice for the chief ministership.

**T**here is another, lesser known, side to Jyoti Basu—the dark side of the charismatic persona. This comprises



**Rajiv Gandhi with Jyoti Basu: keeping their options open**

his ruthlessness, his inability to forgive a slur or humiliation and a Machiavellian mind. Two of Basu's most significant victories can be attributed to these qualities. The first occasion was in the late 1960s when the Bangla Congress leader Ajoy Mukherjee invited Basu to join his United Front government as deputy chief minister. Mukherjee had seriously underestimated Basu and was later to weep when he was deposed, the Bangla Congress annihilated and the CPI(M) in total command of state politics. The Naxalite years and Siddhartha Shankar Ray's six-year rule constituted a dark period for Basu and the CPI(M). But it was a period of consolidation



ALOK MITRA



**B**asu had foreseen the defeat of the Congress(I) as early as in 1988 and was determined to oust Rajiv Gandhi. So, he cultivated V.P. Singh

and the CPI(M), having gone underground, managed to expand its organisation with amazing rapidity, perhaps by feeding on the Bengali's penchant for subversion and conspiracy.

Basu's second coup followed Pramode Dasgupta's death in 1984. Basu till then had had no control over the CPI(M) party apparatus in the state, despite being head of government. All major policy decisions were taken by Dasgupta and the powerful CPI(M) state committee. All the same, Basu had been assiduously cultivating a number of senior state party leaders and after Dasgupta's death, he thrust Saroj Mukherjee to the position of secretary of the state unit. Today, Basu's grip over the state unit of the party has only strengthened. After Saroj Mukherjee's death, Sailen Dasgupta, a Basu groupie, has taken over.

Today, nobody dares criticise the chief minister, not even the small group of CPI(M) leaders—Abdulla Rasul, Bijoy Modak, Monoranjan Hazra, Khudiram Bhattacharjee, Prabir Sengupta and Gopal Bose led by politburo member Samaj Mukherjee—who vehemently oppose Basu's style of functioning, his links with industrialists like Dhirubhai Ambani and the activities of his son, Chandan Basu. In the past few years, several CPI(M) leaders have either been expelled from the party or completely marginalised for their antipathy to Basu. Expelled CPI(M) activists have

formed several rival organisations in different West Bengal districts; the ranks of former CPI(M) cardholders had swelled to over 3,500 by the middle of last year. These communists have tried to form a united front against the CPI(M) and Jyoti Basu in particular, but have completely failed.

Not surprising, considering that Jyoti Basu today is something of a demi-god in West Bengal. Even Congressmen privately regard Basu as a phenomenon. Basu himself has cultivated the image of being a clean, honest, no-nonsense administrator. All the government's mistakes are blamed on the party. Nothing sticks on Basu. Not even corruption charges. When the chief minister was charged with showing undue favour to Bengal Lamps, the casualty was not Basu, but the powerful PWD minister Jatin Chakraborty, who had leaked details of the scandal. The activities of the CM's son, Chandan Basu, might have dismayed many of Basu's supporters. But even in this case, it is Chandan Basu who gets the blame; the chief minister, as the harrowed father, is more pitted than reviled.

**B**asu is smart. And every major political player after interacting with the Marxist boss from Bengal soon realises what he is up against. Only, Rajiv Gandhi realised when it was too late. His last-minute futile wooing of Basu before the Lok Sabha polls, only strengthened Basu's hand.

Basu had foreseen the defeat of the Congress(I) as early as in 1988 and was determined to dispossess Rajiv Gandhi, who had made personal attacks on him during the 1987 state Assembly campaign. Basu cultivated V.P. Singh and in his single-minded pursuit of removing the Congress(I) from power, once even recommended the formation of a united front which could include the BJP as a partner. This view was contested within the CPI(M) politburo, especially by party chief E.M.S. Namboodiripad and M. Basavapunniah.

The party leadership had released a draft political resolution in advance of its 13th party congress, which was held in December 1988, calling for the immediate removal of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I) government. The main line advocated in the resolution was summed up in the slogan "Rajiv hatao, desh bachao" (remove Rajiv, save the nation). The Bengal unit of the party assumed that the bringing down of the Congress(I) government at the Centre was its foremost task. Namboodiripad, however, dismayed his Bengal comrades by declaring, at the state conference, that tactics and strategy could not be separated.

He went on to argue that the danger from communal and right-reactionary forces like the BJP could not be underestimated. His suggestion that the isolation of the BJP was as important as the defeat of the Congress(I) totally contradicted the party's stand



in Haryana, where the CPI(M) was allied to Devi Lal's Lok Dal, which, in turn was allied to the BJP. If the Namboodiripad line was to be accepted, then such alliances would have to be ruled out in future. And, as every political observer in the country knew, there could be no chance of a Congress(I) defeat in the Hindi heartland without a tacit understanding between the main Opposition front and the BJP.

B.T. Ranadive, however, defended the Basu line by warning "Any hesitation about working for this combination (V P. Singh's National Front) will mean the combination of this party and communal forces which will completely result in the loss of initiative

officials, Basu offered 'suggestions' on a number of issues, including the transfer of a few key officials, changes in customs and excise tariffs before the budget and speedy clearance of a number of projects.

Basu has met finance minister Madhu Dandavate with a long list of 20 major demands. Bureaucrats in New Delhi claim that Basu is kept informed of all Cabinet decisions and, in many cases, has objected to some decisions. Key CPI(M) MPs and Basu groupies, like Somnath Chatterjee and Amal Dutta, regularly make requests to National Front ministers; in return, these MPs defend the government in Parliament.

CPI(M) MPs have defended even

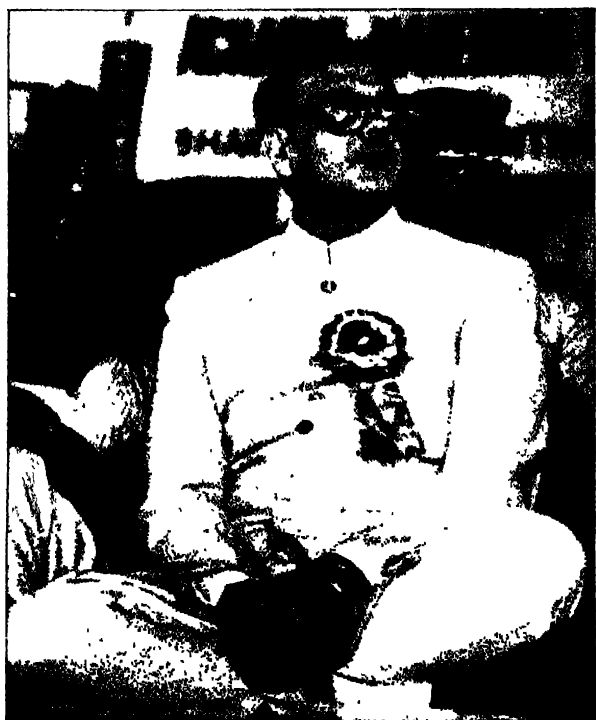
have intervened on behalf of the Ambanis and advocated compromise in the Larsan & Toubro matter.

While all this undoubtedly demonstrates Jyoti Basu's clout, it also suggests that Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh will sooner or later have to clip Basu's wings before he gets too powerful. This, in fact, constitutes the biggest challenge for Basu. If he loses, he will once again be relegated to a mere parochial player, mired in the *panchayat* politics of Bengal. If he wins, Basu will not only emerge as the country's most powerful Marxist but as a major power-centre. The sparring between Basu and V P. Singh has only begun. The first clash was over the nationalisation of the sick industrial unit, Bengal Potteries. Basu had made this a prestige issue but was snubbed by industries minister Ajit Singh, who announced that there could be no question of nationalising any sick unit. Basu's attempts to carry a brief for the Ambanis has also annoyed V P. Singh, who seems to have ordered finance minister Dandavate to soft-pedal the 20-odd proposals put forward by Basu.

In retaliation, Basu has let loose a broadside against the National Front government on the price issue. Statewide rallies were held in Bengal in mid-May to protest against the Centre's failure to combat inflation and its introduction of an obviously inflationary budget. At the May Day rally in Calcutta, the Marxist chief minister also ranted against Ajit Singh for his "irresponsible" statements on nationalisation. He said, "Such comments will tarnish the image of the National Front government and the Congress(I) will make capital out of it." A few days later, he added that the National Front government still enjoyed the "unconditional support" of the left parties, but insinuated that a time might come when they would have to think twice about continuing the support.

Vishwanath Pratap Singh, perhaps, hopes to tame Basu by offering sops. The Marxist chief minister's visit to Vietnam as a state guest was aimed at assuaging his ruffled feathers. But Basu is a pragmatist. He is not taken in by sweet talk or empty assurances. After enduring 40 years of *realpolitik*, Jyoti Basu today is looking for concrete rewards that come from the barrel of raw power. ●

**Indranil Banerjee/New Delhi and Calcutta**



**V.P. Singh will, sooner or later, have to clip Jyoti Basu's wings before he gets too powerful. This constitutes the biggest challenge for Basu**

for the people and the left." To make his pro-National Front stance more palatable to leaders like Namboodiripad, Basu secured an assurance from V P. Singh that the 15 points raised by the National Campaign Committee, made up of left and secular parties, would be included in the National Front manifesto. This was yet another triumph for Basu and it paved the way for his entry into national politics once V.P. Singh took over as Prime Minister.

**T**he moment Jyoti Basu realised that he had secured a toehold in New Delhi, he began exercising his new-found clout. According to several Janata Dal ministers and South Block

the most indefensible of government actions, including the tapping of Janata Dal leader Chandra Shekhar's telephone. Jyoti Basu himself defended the railway budget and retracted only later when he realised that it would fuel inflation and thereby go against the spirit of the National Front manifesto. In return, he has received major concessions from the Centre, chief among them being the speedy technical clearance of the augmented Rs 3,000-crore Haldia project and direct Soviet credit for the Bakreshwar thermal power project. The Planning Commission has, however, objected to the concept of a state getting direct credit from a foreign government. Basu is also reported to





Police firing at demonstrators in Meham: brutal measures

SANTOSH GUPTA/THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# The mayhem continues

*And Om Prakash Chautala is its first victim. Will the Janata Dal be the second?*

**"O**m Prakash Chautala does not run away from the battlefield, he makes others flee," the Haryana chief minister had declared after violence and blatant rigging had marred the Assembly elections in his constituency—Me ham in Haryana—on 27 February. Chautala's determination to prove his supremacy turned Meham into a battleground yet again, and destroyed his chief ministership

The people of Meham were reeling under shock and a grim sense of *deja vu* last week after a renewed wave of terror led to a countermanding of the polls for the second time this year. "That it should happen once is our ill luck, that it should happen again, so soon, just shows that the government (at the Centre) has abandoned us to our fate," says a village elder stoically. "This time, we are not going to sit quiet and get trampled upon by those

in power," counters Ranbir Singh, a farm-hand in Madina. This tiny village, 25 kms from Bainsi, is the focus of ill-gotten attention since eight people lost their lives in election violence last February.

Barely three months after its name came to symbolise an indelible blotch on the country's democratic and electoral fabric, Meham has again hit the headlines. "I will blind those who dare to cast an evil eye on me. I will chop off the tongue that casts aspersions on me. I will cut off every finger that is lifted against me," the deputy prime minister's son is said to have threatened during his campaign, carefully skirting Meham after an initial show of strength at a well-attended rally on 1

May. "I am so confident that I will win, I don't need to campaign there," he had declared earlier this month. And as if foretelling a gory encore in Meham, Chautala announced that he would contest from another constituency, Darba Kalan, to ensure that his future was not left hanging in the balance. However prudent a decision that might be, the acid test for him remained not his sure-fire win from another constituency, but victory from Meham.

The events of Thursday, 17 May, changed all that. In the early morning light, a farm-hand in Mundhal village, on the Delhi-Hissar road, discovered the body of Amir Singh, an independent candidate from Meham. The

Chautala: forced to resign





36-year-old politician had been shot at point-blank range; a single bullet had pierced his left ear to emerge from the right temple. The deputy election commissioner countermanded the byelection to be held on 26 May, in accordance with Section 52 of the Representation of the People Act. The Act stipulates that the death of any contesting candidate, between the period of scrutiny of the nomination papers and the start of the poll, would lead to countermanding. Once again violence prevented people from exercising their franchise in this constituency, merely two hours away from the capital.

Even as the villagers of Madina crowded the dirt track that led to the cluster of houses where Amir Singh lived, the chief minister's cavalcade arrived in a flurry of dust to condole the murdered man's family. "He was one of our own," Chautala told the villagers. The bereaved family agreed readily. "For over 20 years now, my younger brother has lived at Devi Lal's feet," corroborated Pratap Singh, a village *sarpanch* in the area. Then why was the young candidate contesting against the Tau's son? "He was a cover candidate," explain the villagers, adding, "Chautala's key man in the constituency. Only our enemies could have killed him."

As the chief minister shed tears at the demise of his "cover candidate", the state machinery was working overtime to establish that the "enemy" was indeed to blame for the foul crime. Pratap Singh is sure that the "enemy" is indeed Anand Singh Dangri, Chautala's arch electoral rival in the constituency. In the First Information Report (FIR) that was filed at the Bhiwani police station the same day, Pratap Singh has named four men, including Dangri, his elder brother Dharampal and two other supporters. According to the villagers, it was only after Amir Singh's funeral that all hell broke loose in a bloody repeat of history in Meham. Three people, including two women, lost their lives that evening, as police attempted to arrest Dangri, ostensibly acting on the instructions of the chief minister himself. The pink walls of Dangri's house are pockmarked with bullets. When the police attacked, the candidate was standing



A bus burnt by a mob in Madina: unprecedented violence

on the arched open balcony on the first floor. He ducked, to escape the police and disappear into the village untraced. Dangri's servant, Krishan Lal, was not so lucky, and was shot dead. A few houses away, 15-year-old Yashwanti succumbed to a bullet that was fired through a window, outside, Bartho, a 65-year-old woman, was

returning from a day in the fields when two bullets struck her dead.

The day after Amir Singh's funeral, a deathly calm descended on Madina. The constituency was cordoned off by policemen, only intrepid journalists were let past. On an adjacent road, the villagers themselves had decided to block the road by felling trees on either side. "We are prepared for

the worst tonight," they explain. "The police won't dare enter here."

True enough, there wasn't a policeman in sight of Madina. At the village square outside Dangri's house, men huddled around dormant *hookahs*, while the women hid in their homes, wondering what fresh onslaught the night will bring. Vacant stares fol-

## On the defensive

*The NF government finds itself in a tight spot over Meham*

The Meham nightmare continues to haunt the National Front government. The incidents in Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala's constituency dominated the proceedings in both the Houses of Parliament last week. And for once, Prime Minister V.P. Singh and his colleagues were found fumbling in the face of a sustained offensive from the Opposition Congress(I) members.

Last time, too, the violence in Meham and allegations of rigging during a byelection had embarrassed the ruling government considerably. But somehow, the V.P. Singh regime managed to wriggle out of the sticky situation by ordering a repoll. This time, however, the government finds itself in a much more hopeless mess.

In both the Houses, Congress members raised the issue and demanded stringent measures against the Haryana government. Home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed first announced that the Centre had asked the Haryana government to probe the murder of the indepen-

dent candidate from Meham constituency. His decision was vociferously opposed by the Opposition, forcing the home minister to order a CBI enquiry into the matter. But that too did not satisfy the Congress members who kept insisting that an enquiry committee of the Parliament should probe the issue. Even the Janata Dal's Rajmangal Pandey supported the Opposition demand but V.P. Singh turned down the proposal.

But the press and the Congress(I) kept up the pressure on the Prime Minister. Arun Shourie wrote an article in the *Indian Express* attacking the government, following which L.C. Jain, member, Planning Commission, resigned from the economic body. Several Union ministers and senior Janata Dal leaders, too, met V.P. Singh and urged him to act fast. Finally, the Prime Minister announced that the Centre was considering the option of holding Assembly elections in Haryana. But meanwhile, a sitting judge of





(Above) Anand Singh Dangri; (left) villagers pointing at bullet marks on the wall of Dangri's house: target of Chautala?

Devi Lal, Dangri had, over the past few months, become Chautala's most formidable opponent. He commanded the backing of the powerful Meham Chaubisi (the combined *panchayats* of 24 villages), which assured him a substantial chunk of the Jat vote (Jats command two-thirds of the 15 lakh votes in Meham), a factor Chautala was uneasy about. Apparently, Dangri had all along feared that the elections would not be free and fair.

RAJIV SHUKLA

the Supreme Court would go into the Meham affairs, V.P. Singh added.

But the Opposition was not to be placated and kept up the heat both inside and outside the House. On 21 May, the Political Affairs Committee of the Janata Dal met late into the night—Devi Lal was conspicuous by his absence—and unanimously decided to ask Chautala to step down. Finally, on 22 May, the Haryana chief minister submitted his resignation to S.R. Bommai, the newly appointed party chief. But the question is: will the resignation precipitate a fresh crisis within the Janata Dal?

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**

lowed impassioned pleas for justice, as the villagers led this correspondent to the room where Dangri's wife, Sona Pyari, was consoling his old mother. Flaying her hands in the air, Sona Pyari made a case for her missing husband: if Chautala's family was close to Amir Singh, so was Dangri's. Not so long ago, Dangri's elder brother, Dharampal, had given Amir Singh a job at the sugar mill he managed. "How could they accuse my husband of murder?" she says, "This is definitely the handiwork of Chautala."

Dangri's supporters, insist that it is fear that has compelled Prakash Singh to sign on the FIR allegedly filed by Chautala's men. Once the right-hand man and campaign manager of

**C**rowding around Amir Singh's widow, his family points out that Dangri would not be absconding if he were innocent. "They (the police) would probably have killed him by now if they had laid their hands on him," insists Sona Pyari, who had fled indoors amidst a storm of bullets the day her husband disappeared. "He was saved by the public that day, or else he would have died." She denies having any idea about her husband and brother-in-law's whereabouts. The crowd outside Dangri's home says they saw his newly-appointed bodyguard join the police in the firing and leave with them.

Interestingly, even Amir Singh had been allotted a bodyguard barely 24 hours before his body was found



abandoned in a field. While Amir Singh's family stubbornly point an accusing finger at Dangi's supporters, circumstantial evidence suggests that it could have been anybody. Says Moolchand Jain, former state finance minister and a staunch Dangi supporter, "I have not an iota of doubt that Chautala is behind this murder. I had predicted two weeks ago that chief minister would not allow a free and fair election because he is a desperate man." Sitting in the room where villagers have congregated to mourn Amir Singh's death, Jain attempts to piece together the murky jigsaw puzzle of events that led to the countermanding of the elections. "The police and Amir Singh's family admit that he never returned to his village, his body was found in Bhiwani. Where does Dangi come in?"

The reconstruction of events have so far yielded no definite evidence; the



## Storming a citadel

*Rajiv Gandhi draws large crowds in Chautala's constituency*

**F**or former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it was a god-sent opportunity to cash in on the Janata Dal's misfortunes. On 20 May, the Congress(I) president visited Meham to assure the masses that they were not alone in their fight for democratic rights.

Rajiv Gandhi's impressive cavalcade of around 500 vehicles started from his 10 Janpath residence at ten in the morning. Heading the long line of cars, trucks, buses and motorcycles was the Congress president's white Maruti Gypsy, with Rajiv Gandhi at the wheels and his son, Rahul, beside him. On way to Meham, the motorcade was stopped at several places by locals, who were waiting for hours to greet the former PM.

Rajiv Gandhi reached the village of Madina around 1.30 pm. He got off the car, and accompanied by the villagers and his followers, the Congress president led a *padayatra*

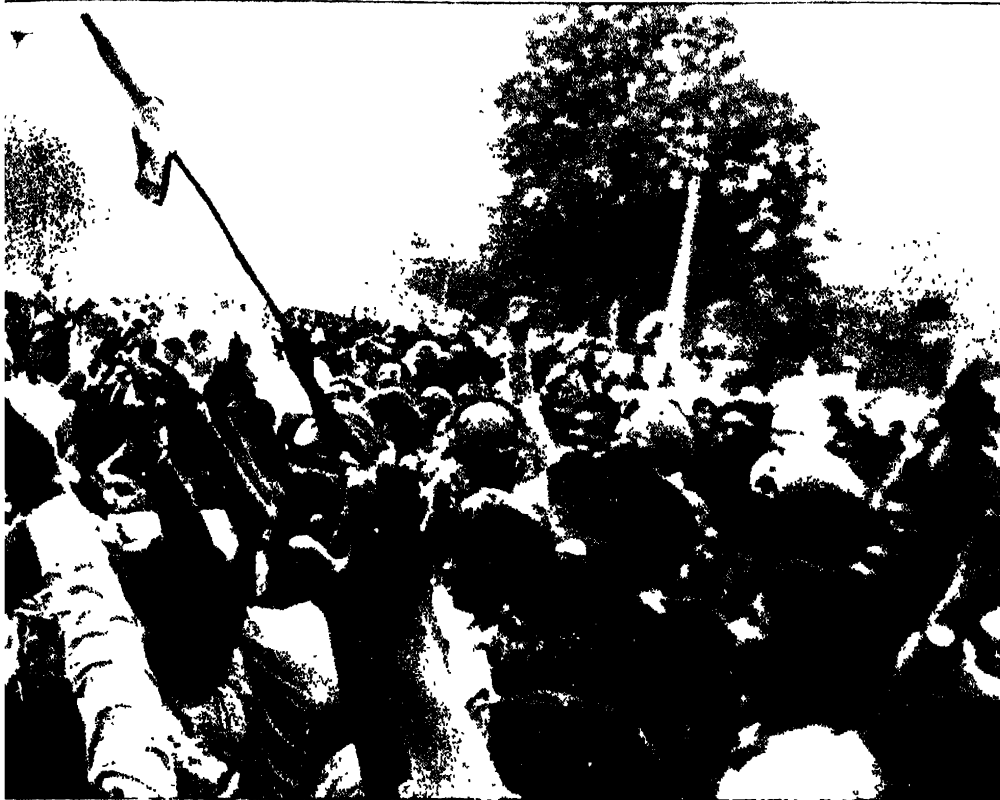
through the village to the house of Amir Singh, the independent candidate who was brutally murdered.

After spending some time with members of the bereaved family, Rajiv Gandhi's next destination

was the residence of Anand Singh Dangi. By now, the crowd had swelled to well over 50,000 and Rajiv Gandhi had to jostle through the masses to enter Dangi's house. Inside, the former PM spoke to Dangi's wife, who gave him some







**Rajiv Gandhi mobbed by villagers in Madina; (left) the Congress president with son Rahul on his way to Meham: a fruitful visit**

empty cartridges.

Outside, the crowds were still waiting for Rajiv Gandhi to emerge. The Congress president addressed the gathering, assuring the villagers that his party would side with them in their battle against the Haryana government.

The cavalcade then made its way towards Bainsi village, where Rajiv Gandhi told the villagers that had he been the Prime Minister, he would have sacked the Haryana government for perpetrating violence.

The Congress president also visited several other villages under the Meham constituency. And everywhere, Rajiv Gandhi drew crowds that were reminiscent of the days when the former PM's popularity was at its height. The mission over, around 6 in the evening, Rajiv Gandhi and his men started the long journey back to Delhi.

**Rajiv Shukla/Meham**

murderer could have belonged to either camp, or been a rank outsider. One thing is certain, somebody wanted to ensure that Meham went without elections even this time around. And he has been successful.

Dangi's supporters allege that Amir Singh was last seen the night before, at a dinner party hosted by a Janata Dal party worker, Shashi Kala, in Rohtak. He looked tired and tense after a hectic day of campaigning. Reportedly, the chief minister was also present at the party. Dangi's supporters allege that there was a heated exchange between Chautala and Amir Singh, and the latter left the dinner party accompanied by Abhay Singh, Chautala's eldest son, around 11 pm. His car and bodyguard waited for him at the Canal Guest House. Now Abhay Singh has apparently denied that his father's cover candidate took a lift in his car.

What happened in the hours that followed, till the body was discovered at 5.45 am, is anybody's guess. The initial post-mortem reports reveal that a Mauser revolver was held close to the murdered man's left ear, his family admits that there was very little blood at the site where the body was discovered, though the wound was still oozing. This probably signifies that Amir Singh was shot dead in a car at

point-blank range and dumped in the neighbouring Bhiwani district—tyre-marks of a jeep were faintly visible in the field.

Not surprisingly, the news of countermanding of election in Meham led to mayhem in the House. The home minister ruled out a parliamentary probe, saying that there were no investigating agencies under Parliament. Even as a judicial probe by a sitting judge of a Supreme Court was ordered into the incident, Chautala swore that he was still willing to contest from Meham. "These people who would be defeated because of the lack of public support, had tried to save their self-respect by organising a murder," he alleged.

Meanwhile, Dangi has sought the protection of the Prime Minister, alleging that he was "facing all kinds of threat from the Haryana government and the police." The results of the judicial enquiry and the events that follow should seal Chautala's career. This time, his father may not be able to shield him as effectively as he had in February. Even if Chautala had nothing to do with the present events in Madina, his credibility has taken a beating, from which he may never recover. ●

**Shiraz Siddiqui/Meham**



# Bomma is the boss

*The former Karnataka CM is elected president of the Janata Dal*

If there was ever any doubts about who—or rather which group—calls the shots in the Janata Dal, the party's presidential polls on 20 May set all speculations at rest. The election of the former Karnataka chief minister S.R. Bommai as president of the Dal unopposed is actually a victory for the Chandra Shekhar-Devi Lal-Ajit Singh axis over the group led by Prime Minister V.P. Singh.

Actually, the V.P. Singh camp admitted defeat much before the elections the day its candidate S Jaipal Reddy withdrew from the presidential race. Reddy, on his part, was keen to contest but had to give in to the pressure from senior Janata Dal leaders like Devi Lal, Chandra Shekhar, Ajit Singh and a host of party chief ministers including Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chimanbhai Patel, Laloo Yadav and Biju Patnaik. In fact, Reddy was upset with V.P. Singh for egging him on to contest and then backing out at a crucial stage.

That the party election would be a stormy affair became apparent after Chandra Shekhar, a bitter rival of the Prime Minister, stepped in. It was Chandra Shekhar who convinced Bommai to contest, but since he wanted to remain in the background, Shekhar got Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala to propose the former Karnataka CM's name. And to make sure that Bommai does not lose, Chandra Shekhar even put up Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav as a candidate so that the backward class votes did not go to Reddy. But despite Chandra Shekhar's backing, at one time it seemed that Jaipal Reddy had the edge. The latter had approached Union textiles minister Sharad Yadav,

who had apparently assured Reddy of his support. This was significant since Yadav controls a sizeable number of MPs and MLAs from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Jaipal Reddy, for a while, looked a sure winner.

But Devi Lal upset V.P. Singh's calculations. The deputy prime minister, who was touring China when things were hotting up within the Janata Dal, was informed of the goings-on. Devi Lal immediately cal-

led up his camp follower Sharad Yadav from China and asked him to support S.R. Bommai. That finally sealed the fate of Jaipal Reddy.

But more drama was in store after Devi Lal returned from his China trip. He met his one-time rival Ajit Singh and elicited the Union industry minister's crucial support for Bommai's candidature.

On 17 May, three days before the crucial election, Devi Lal, Ajit Singh and Sharad Yadav met Jaipal Reddy and reasoned with him to withdraw in favour of Bommai. But Jaipal Reddy stuck to his ground. Finally, Biju Patnaik intervened and warned Reddy that he would lose by a big margin and in that event he could never get a party post in future. Jaipal Reddy gave in but not before he was promised the post of secretary-general of the Janata Dal.

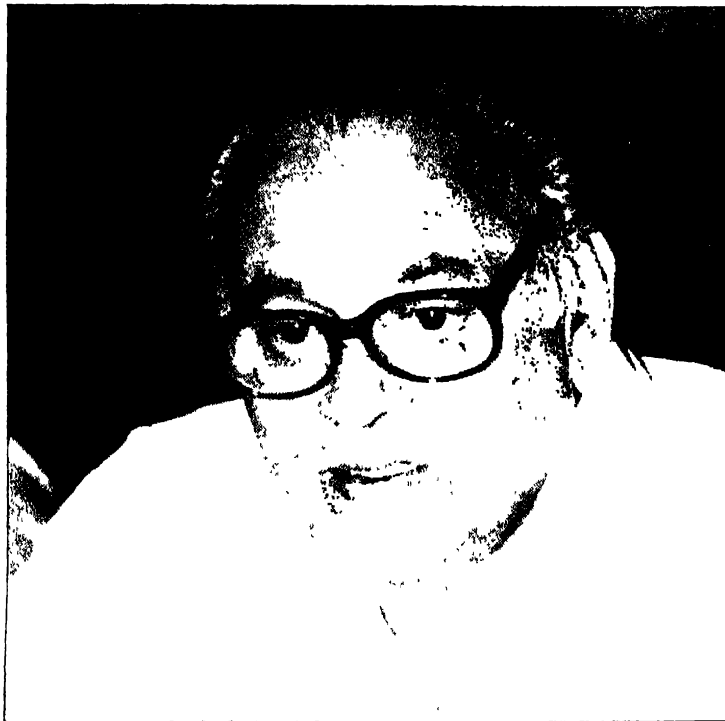
Once Jaipal Reddy opted out from the contest, Chandra Shekhar got Hukumdeo Yadav to withdraw. And, S.R. Bommai was elected interim president of the Janata Dal unopposed.

But is the V.P. Singh camp likely to accept defeat? Not really.

Already, efforts are on to curtail the powers of the interim party president. The day after Bommai was chosen Dal chief, the Prime Minister's followers got strongman Biju Patnaik to issue a controversial statement saying that the post of interim president was equivalent to that of a "chief peon".

Political observers in the capital feel that the presidential polls have only increased infighting within the Janata Dal. And if the recent election is any indication, the forthcoming organisational polls are likely to witness more of such drama and tension. •

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**



**S.R. Bommai: easy winner**

**The V.P. Singh camp is not ready to accept defeat. It got Biju Patnaik to issue a statement saying that Bommai's post is similar to that of a "chief peon"**



# Shanta of the spirits

*A new movie explores demonic possession*

**A**s maiden efforts go, Nilita Vachani's *Eyes Of Stone* is particularly impressive. Dealing with the largely unheard of phenomenon of spiritual possession—which is, nonetheless, very common in Rajasthan—the film won accolades, both at home and abroad.

Documenting the life of a possessed woman, Shanta, who was 'cured' in the Bhankya Mata temple near Asind in Bhilwara district, the film won a special mention in the Cinéma du



*Eyes Of Stone: an unusual and impressive film*

Reele Festival held in Paris earlier this year. Sponsored by Doordarshan, *Eyes Of Stone* was also screened at the International Festival Des Femme in France, to a receptive audience.

Though the ambit of the film is restricted to Shanta and the Bhankya Mata temple, spiritual possession is a widely accepted fact in Gujarat and Rajasthan, says Vachani, a graduate from the Annenberg School of Communications and the Art Institute of Chicago. "You can just walk upto any person in a Rajasthan village and ask where they go to exorcise spirits. It's that casual," says the director.

Vachani sees this bizarre, wide-spread phenomenon—though confined mainly to women—as an instance of a "sense of desire functioning through spiritual possession". A woman who spends all her life neither seen nor heard can speak her mind freely and abuse as much as she wants through the medium of the spirit. "It is the spirit who is talking, not her," explains Vachani (who began her film career as an assistant to Mira Nair during the making of *Salaam Bombay!*). The spirit, apparently, becomes a "mode of resistance to suppressing circumstances".

Shanta, the protagonist of *Eyes Of Stone* supports Vachani's hypothesis. The film is an intimate portrayal of her traumatic and fragmented existence. She is married, has two sons,

but is forced to live with her parents because her truck-driver husband is never around. When he does return, it is only to taunt her about her cooking, and how much easier it would be for him to get another woman.

The monotony of Shanta's existence is broken when she gets possessed by a spirit—the *daakan* who virtually rules her life, overpowering her at the unlikely moments and offering her a chance to escape to a higher reality. The *daakan* hurts her, makes her climb walls (literally), beats her, and then leaves her senseless. It takes Shanta five visits, spread over five Saturdays, to the local Bhankya Mata temple before she is 'cured'.

**Nilita Vachani: winning accolades**



Shanta's is not an exceptional case. Hundreds of women visit the temple every week for the Saturday night ritual, explains Vachani, adding that it takes a woman a maximum of five to seven weeks to be 'cured'. Curiously enough, no one ever takes longer than this to revert to normalcy.

The film vividly captures the intensity of the Saturday rituals, culminating in Shanta's running to the dirty water tank outside the temple compound, soaking herself in it, drinking the

putrid water and then dancing with an old shoe in her mouth. Vachani explains that the rituals differ from temple to temple, though their end result is much the same.

The director first chanced upon 'possession' when she was a student in Delhi. Her maidservant had been possessed and had to be taken to a temple where she was mercilessly beaten with chains by the priest. "I was fascinated by the entire episode. Then my view was more simplistic. I thought mainly in terms of the poor vulnerable thing being exploited. I never saw it from her point of view," says Vachani.

A reading of Sudhir Kakar's *Shaman's Mystics And Doctors* in 1987 made Vachani see things differently. And it led the young director to a visit of all the temples and *dargahs* in Gujarat and Rajasthan, before she finally decided on the Bhankya Mata temple as the setting of her film.

"The idea was to go beyond the trance," she says, and Asind was deliberately chosen because its rituals are relatively less bizarre and would not divert attention from the central theme. There are few close-ups of women in trance; Shanta is no raving Rajasthani beauty dressed in exotic mirror-work skirts; and nor is there any other overt glamorisation. Says Vachani. "We deliberately de-aesthetised to put things in context."

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



**MANDI HOUSE**  
*Autonomy remains a pipedream*

# Making news

*Politicians and bureaucrats decide what Doordarshan's current affairs programmes should be*

It was autonomy at its best, but certainly not clever television. One of the clips used for the 13 May English newscast was of "prominent politicians" paying homage to former President Fakrudin Ali Ahmed on his death anniversary. Among them was the previous regime's TV superstar, Rajiv Gandhi. This, according to Doordarshan, was evidence enough to prove that the Janata Dal had fulfilled its electoral promise of granting editorial freedom to the government-controlled medium.

A minute later, Prime Minister V.P. Singh was shown speaking to newsmen in Bangalore as if to emphasise Rajiv's appearance by this means of clever juxtaposition. In that press conference, Singh, for the first time, aired his views on Doordarshan. "I am not satisfied with the performance (of Doordarshan)," he said, "but, you see, old habits die hard."

In that press conference, which was seen by viewers all over the country, the Prime Minister went on to make a suggestion that later became the subject of some ridicule:

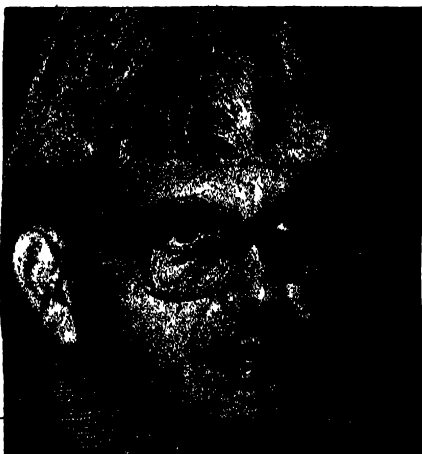
"If you don't like my face on televi-

sion," said Singh, managing a faint smile for the TV cameras, "just drop me a postcard. I'll tell Doordarshan not to bore you any more. But you must have noticed some changes...the other point of view also has to be shown. We are giving time to the Opposition!"

The joke doing the rounds in the capital is that for days after that newscast, all work in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) came to a halt.

**V.P. SINGH**

*He is not happy with Doordarshan's functioning. Says old habits die hard*



RAKESH SAHAI

The reason: the PMO was buried beneath an avalanche of mail from all over the country. On the serious side, viewers criticised the insensitive manner in which the newscast had been handled—with V.P. Singh boasting about giving autonomy to Doordarshan immediately after it had shown the former Prime Minister on the small screen.

The popular euphoria about the Janata Dal's electoral pledge of granting autonomy to Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR) is now largely over and no one is more responsible for this disillusionment than the Janata Dal leaders themselves. Though the Prashar Bharati Bill, which seeks to grant autonomy to the two government-controlled mass media, was introduced in Parliament on 29 Decem-

ber, and the Union information and broadcasting (I&B) minister P. Upendra told SUNDAY that an autonomous Doordarshan will be "a little better than the BBC", the trend of the Doordarshan's programmes suggests that Mandi House is sliding back to dishing out the kind of fare it offered during its days of 'Rajiv darshan'.

While V.P. Singh is believed to have been recently advised by P. Upendra to appear more frequently on television, the members of his Cabinet made a bee-line for the idiot box soon after they came to power. Among Doordarshan's current favourites are labour minister Ram Vilas Paswan and the 'home team' of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Subodh Kant Sahay. Telephone calls from Cabinet ministers to Doordarshan newsroom are not uncommon and, according to an insider, "only our masters have changed. The pressures for broadcasting government propaganda remain the same".

In the opinion of film and television critic Amita Malik, "After the elections, Doordarshan seems to have been taken over by bureaucrats from the IIS (Indian Information Service)



and the radio gang. There is no dissent on TV and there is an apparent drive against professionals from outside." Added S.S. Gill, the former information and broadcasting (I&B) secretary, "I don't understand why the government should develop cold feet. They are adopting a self-defeating policy regarding TV. Maybe it is because having tasted power they want to wield it also."

While the quality of sponsored programmes and serials currently telecast is deplorable, Doordarshan's policy, or the lack of it, is betrayed by its current affairs and news programmes. An indication of the tightening grip of bureaucrats on the organisation can be had from its recent effort to ban private producers from current affairs programmes. Earlier, these producers had been told that they could not be assigned more than one programme at a time, but now Doordarshan has decided to shut the door on them. The latest move has, naturally, generated a lot of resentment among the freelancers. What is worse, word has gone around that Doordarshan's own producers, who initiated the ban, are now expressing their doubts about being able to produce in-house current affair programmes. The mandarins in Mandi House are, therefore, in for some serious trouble on this front.

**A**t first, a delegation of Doordarshan's own producers had met Upendra with the plea that they were being discriminated against. They wondered why private producers should be paid Rs 2 to 3 lakhs per programme when they could be produced by Doordarshan itself. Upendra, eager to keep the staff happy, promptly announced a "change in policy." And it was hardly surprising that the first to be axed were those producers who were, apparently, in the 'favoured' list of the previous government.

Most severely hit has been Vinod Dua, the *Janvani* man. After the elections, Dua had approached Mandi House with the proposal of a Hindi newsmagazine along the lines of *The World This Week*. The proposal was cleared; Dua was given a hefty advance for the assignment and the first episode of the newsmagazine was scheduled for telecast on 7 May. But three weeks before the telecast, the producer was informed that Doordarshan had decided to produce the programme with the help of its own correspondents.

Shashi Kumar of PTI TV fears his programmes might feature on Doordarshan's hit-list too. He had been commissioned a *Focus* programme on Centre-state relations to be shown on 13 May. The PTI team, interviewed, among others, Veerendra Patil, M. Karunanidhi, Biju Patnaik and Jyoti Basu. But the programme still remains canned. Asks the producer: "There are six chief minister's involved in this programme. Their

cent—again mid-contract—which could put the popular programme in jeopardy.

Going by this pattern, the next producer who might find himself in a fix is Suman Dubey, the former Prime Minister's media advisor who has just launched on a career in television. Dubey recently produced a *Focus* programme on the hazards of high-rise buildings. But who knows when someone in Mandi House would wake to

## THE IMPORTANT PRODUCERS



**SUMAN DUBEY**



**ASHOK RAINA**



**VINOD DUA**

*Their programmes are being axed, but no one knows why*

offices keep ringing me up. What should I tell them? Yes or no?"

The producer who seemed most eager for a fight with Doordarshan bosses was Ashok Raina, chief executive, ITV. Raina says two of his *Focus* programmes have been lying with Doordarshan for over two years and now he plans to take the organisation to court. "Meeting people in Mandi House does not help. I don't know of any MP who wants to take up the cause of independent broadcasting in Parliament. So the only option left is the Supreme Court."

Many, including producers like Raina, feel that the decisions taken by Doordarshan are not really arbitrary but that there is a method in its madness. Besides Dua, who regularly featured on election special programmes during the Congress(I) rule, Pranjoy Roy, who conceptualised the specials for Mandi House, seems to be heading for a show-down also. Sponsorship rates for Roy's *The World This Week* have been hiked by 64 per

cent—again mid-contract—which could put the popular programme in jeopardy.

**I**t is interesting that while most members of the 1989 media think-tank were given other posts—some have managed to cling on, allegedly with pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). During Rajiv's term, besides the bosses of Mandi House, H.K.L. Bhagat and K.K. Tewari as ministers and PMO bureaucrats such as Mani Shankar Aiyar and G. Parthasarthy used to

interfere with the Doordarshan's day-to-day functioning. Besides them, R.K. Dhawan and Satish Sharma were the other extra-constitutional advisors.

Presently, Doordarshan is receiving orders mostly from career bureaucrats from the Indian Information Service. Shiv Sharma is still functioning as the acting director general—which obviously is the government's way of keeping the Mandi House boss on his toes. Sharma's team also remains large-

**P. UPENDRA**  
*He advised V.P. Singh to appear more frequently on TV*



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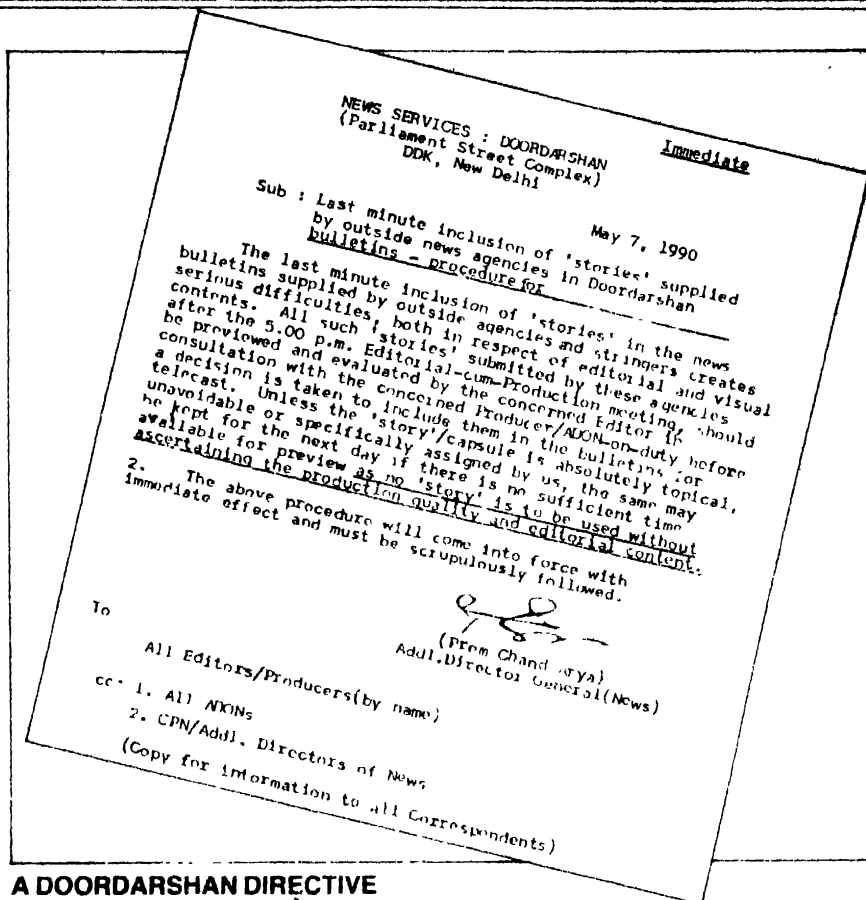
largely unchanged.

Some noticeable shifts did, however, take place in Doordarshan's news-rooms on Parliament Street. Among the first to be moved out was Harish Awasthi, the additional director general (news), who was branded as a Rajiv man. Awasthi is now director of Field Publicity. The key post in Doordarshan was given to Prem Chand Arya, formerly the acting director of All India Radio. Bhaskar Ghose, who was brought in as additional joint secretary in the I&B ministry, was soon asked to assist George Fernandes on his Kashmir assignment. Though Ghose had had a long stint as the director general, Doordarshan, this time his disenchantment with the medium came much faster. And if Ghose was fed up with the tube, people say, things must be very bad.

Doordarshan correspondents like to describe the current phase in the directorate as an *Aryaraj*. In the second reshuffle of portfolios since the Janata Dal government came to power, Chitra Narain, deputy director general in charge of current affairs, was politely told that Arya would now handle both the beats. Moreover, with the principal information officer in the PMO taking a keen interest in Doordarshan's affairs, there is not much interference from other members of the Prime Minister's Office. With the dual responsibility of I&B and Parliamentary Affairs, Upendra has been unable to devote sufficient time to television. When he does, it is usually in a very abrasive manner. In fact, the I&B secretary, Suresh Mathur, too, seems to be sidelined as far as important matters are concerned.

**W**ith such a monopoly, vested interests were bound to develop. Apparently, R D Saxena, a senior news editor who is officially in charge of the teletext service of Doordarshan, is a favourite of Arya. Recently, an internal circular issued by him stated that in addition to his present responsibility, Saxena would also coordinate the functioning of the news bureau.

Somehow, while Arya has incensed private producers, he has also managed to antagonise Doordarshan's own correspondents. He has discouraged on-camera pieces by them and has, in the past few weeks, spiked suggestions of newscasts on subjects like glucose contamination or the functioning of Vayudoot. Any number of ready, edited stories like the one on



#### A DOORDARSHAN DIRECTIVE

*The letter restricts the use of news supplied by private agencies*

a MiG-25 crash has been dropped because of pressure from politicians.

More recently, Doordarshan's coverage of important news stories like the oil strike or the Andhra Pradesh cyclone was found wanting. Asks Ashok Rama, 'There had been warnings about the cyclone on TV for 10 days. More than 100,000 people

had been evacuated before the cyclone struck. But all that Doordarshan showed was some trees swaying in the wind and the plane of a VIP which was unable to land in the cyclone-hit areas. Is this television journalism?'

Apparently, the additional director general seems to take his job seriously. So much so that he personally monitored the production of theatrical features on Bhagat Singh's death anniversary and another on the festival of Holi. On another occasion, he sat on the console and edited an interview with Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. The clip had nine untidy cuts taking Doordarshan's editing quality back by several years.

The censorship in Doordarshan's newsroom has now been expanded to include the airing of only 'soft stories' in the current affairs slots. Presentation of stories on the country's most pressing problems—Punjab, Kashmir and Ram Janmabhoomi—remains more fictional than realistic. The *kha-di*-clad minister is back on the small screen with a vengeance. Sychophancy and cronyism have returned. With such developments, functional autonomy for television might remain merely a pipedream. ●

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**

#### BHASKAR GHOSE

*It did not take him long to become disillusioned for a second time*



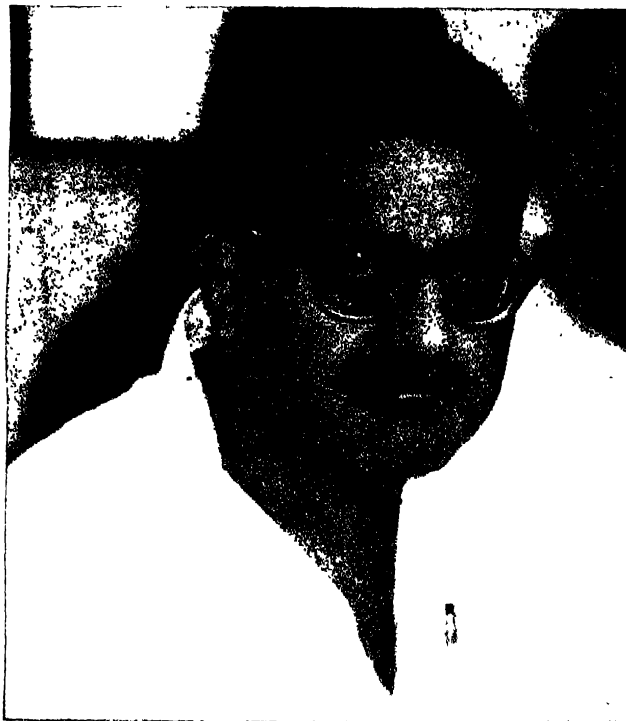


## SINGH AND SINGH

As strange as this may sound now, Vishwanath Pratap Singh was originally Arun Singh's choice for the finance ministry. In those days, Arun Singh was one of the two Aruns who ran the country in tandem with Rajiv and, who handpicked those who were fit to lead the 'new India'.

In 1987, when V.P. Singh became defence minister, Arun Singh was his minister for state and the two got on famously, being united in their belief that Rajiv Gandhi was not playing straight with them.

So, it is only fitting that in 1990, it should be Vishwanath Pratap Singh who is now trying to accommodate Arun



**Arun Singh: a friend in need...**

Singh in his government. There is no shortage of jobs, but Arun Singh has refused to become a minister on the grounds that he is out of politics. V.P. Singh is therefore

trying to find him an advisory post at the ministry of defence. He believes that Arun Singh could accept this and still be said to have remained outside of politics

## FAMILY MAN

Blood is obviously thicker than water. And

**Arun Nehru: in defence of his aunt**



ASHOK DAS

Arun Nehru, the minister for commerce proved it the other day when he

rose against Bimal Khalsa in the Lok Sabha.

Mrs Khalsa, widow of Indira Gandhi's assassin, rarely intervenes in Parliament, but last week she did. Alas, much of what she said cannot be reproduced here, consisting as it did of abuse of Mrs Gandhi. At first, Khalsa's remarks were lost in the din but as the impact of what she was saying sunk in, Congress(I) MPs were quick to protest.

So was Nehru who rose from the treasury benches to protect the memory of his aunt and demand that the remarks be struck off the record.

## AWARDED

He first achieved national recognition with his exposé of the then Maharashtra chief minister A.R. Antulay (remember the Indira Gandhi Trust cement scam?). Arun Shourie then followed that up with his articles on the Kuo oil deal, getting on the cover of *India Today* in the process, as the prime representative of the new investigative journalism movement in the country.

Now editor-in-chief of the *Indian Express*, Shourie has received in-

RAJESH KUMAR



**Arun Shourie: outstanding contribution**

ternational honours, with the bestowal of the Astor Award. Instituted by the late Lord Astor of Hever in 1970, the award was conferred on Shourie by the Commonwealth Press Union "in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the cause of press freedom in India".



## SOPRANO BORDES

“The devil has left me,” announces Ms Bordes, adding, “I threw my address books away. All of them”

In a recent interview to *Harpers and Queen*, our Pam from Haryana holds forth on the editors in her life, the *News of the World* exposé of her dark secret, her escape to Bali, the press-hounds who chased her all over the world (even into the lavatory of the operating theatre of a Hong Kong hospital), her love of modelling and more

“Anything could happen now,” she says about the future, “I might



**Pamela Bordes: the new improved Pam**

write a book, I could be in a movie, I could become a photographer, I

might sing..”

And, of course, remain in the news.

## THE PEN IS MIGHTIER

There aren't many things that the Tau and his arch-enemy Ajit Singh agree upon. But they were united on one point: that the first term MP from Agra, Ajay Singh, be accommodated in the ministerial expansion. And the Raja was only too happy to oblige.

When he began his journalistic career in *In-*



**Ajay Singh: now, a minister**

*dia Today* in 1977, nobody quite imagined that Ajay Singh would end up in government. But a Jat and politics can't be kept apart too long. And sure enough, the journo kicked up his job to take over as managing trustee of the late Charan Singh's Kisan Trust.

The formation of the National Front signalled his arrival as a prime mover of Opposition unity.

Now with the Janata Dal in power, Ajay Singh is reaping the benefits of his labours. And nobody better deserving than him.



**Kavita Daftary (right) with Vinod Khanna: unlikely pair**

## A PREMIER MATCH

Not since Rajan 'Escorts' Nanda married Ritu 'Raj' Kapoor has there been such a match of heavy industry and

*filmi* glamour. But last week, Vinod Khanna, the dimpled leading man of the Hindi screen tied the knot with Kavita Daftary, granddaughter

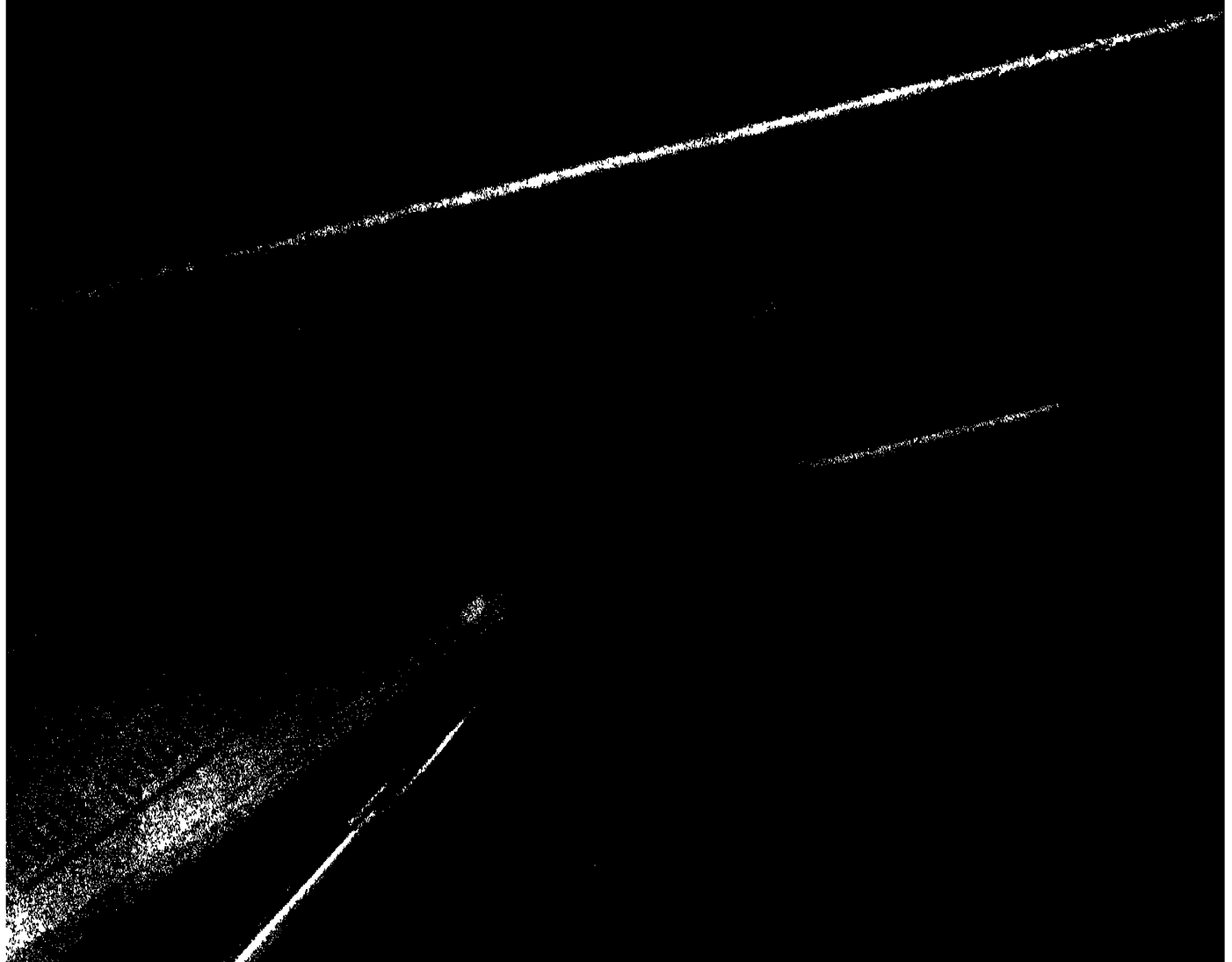
of Seth Lalchand Hirachand (Premier Automobiles, Hindusthan Constructions, Wolchandnagar Industries etc).

The couple had been dating for a year. Khanna is divorced with two children while Daftary, 30, is a barrister with ambitions to follow her entrepreneurial mother;

Sharayu Daftary of Bharat Radiators. The wedding was small and private, and only close friends and family attended.



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III

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VIP



# "I AM NOBODY'S PRIVATE PROPERTY"

*Shatrughan Sinha on politics, disappointment and vindictiveness.  
Interviewed by Amitabh Bachchan*



*It was more a summit meeting than an interview. Shatrughan Sinha and Amitabh Bachchan have long been rivals in the film industry. But over the last three years, they have also become identified with opposing political parties and have carped at each other in interviews*

*So when Sinha agreed to be interviewed by SUNDAY, special correspondent Rajiv Shukla sprang a surprise on him. Would he mind if Bachchan was the interviewer? Not at all, said Sinha, he would enjoy it.*

*Bachchan was slightly more reticent and as the interview progressed (at Bachchan's bungalow in Bombay) was at first reluctant to ask what he called 'political questions' or to interrupt the flow of Sinha's rhetoric.*

*But in the last 45 minutes of the two-hour session, he hit his stride, especially when the conversation turned to his troubles with the regime. Through it all, both men were cordial to each other and finally Sinha told SUNDAY: "We have always been friends. In oratory we may say things but you shouldn't take them seriously"*

*Excerpts from the conversation:*

**Amitabh Bachchan:** Well Shatru, you seem to have succeeded in politics where I failed.

**Shatrughan Sinha:** There was a difference of approach. You joined politics to help a friend. But I have been in politics for a very long time. And in the last few months, I was persuaded by the Janata Dal, the BJP and the left parties and others.

Also, you stood for election. I kept away though, of course, I could have got a ticket from anywhere I wanted. But people thought of you as a messiah and expected you to get things done for them. So it was not Amitabh Bachchan who failed but his image. After all, Amitabh Bachchan is not Mungeri Lal.

**AB:** I found that despite people's expectations, I was really just another MP with no special ability to get things done.

**SS:** I didn't fall into the trap. I could have won from any constituency: after all, when lalloos get elected, then why not Shatrughan Sinha? But I never asked for anything for myself.

Also, I was not motivated by friendship but by a desire to serve the people. They are two different things.

All of today's top leaders are my friends. I can walk into V P Singh's house any time I like. Same with Devi Lal.

But I am not here because of friendship. I have no personal enmity with Rajiv Gandhi. I was against his government. The other day we met in Rashtrapati Bhavan and my wife had herself photographed with him.

**AB:** So you think it is wrong to accept an office?

**SS:** In fact, they offered me the chief ministership of Bihar. Devi Lal himself asked me. But I turned it down.

Because of this, I can criticise the government. I can say they have had laloo budgets. They made a big mistake in Kashmir by compromising on the Rubaiya issue. If things go wrong, I will revolt and ask the people to throw out this government.

**AB:** I feel now that if I use my popularity as a film actor to get people to part with votes, well then, I feel like a bit of a cheat.

*But I suppose your case is different because of the work you've done for the people and because you are seen as a*





GAUTAM PATOLE

**AB**

**You think it is wrong to accept an office?**

**SS**

**They offered me the chief ministership of Bihar. But I turned it down**

*political person. It's like MGR or NTR.*

**SS:** Yes, I think you are right. I have been the people's representative for so long that they responded to me in that way and not as a film actor. Wherever I went, people waited to hear me. In Gwalior, I was 11 hours late but I got a record crowd. Same in Mandi, though in Himachal they go to sleep at 8 pm!

Not in a single place was I asked to recite a dialogue. But had Jeetendra gone there, with due respect, they'd have expected him to dance.

Had you followed my approach, then I think your political career would have been different.

**AB:** Are you happy with what you've achieved?

**SS:** Well, I have many complaints about this government but I'm not sure if it is right to talk about them now. I'm a positive thinker and though at the moment

this government seems no different from the last, I'm praying that things improve.

I may have been responsible for making this government but I am not a blackmailer so I don't want to threaten them. But with due respect, I must point out that the people feel that both the budget and the railway

**Shatrughan Sinha: "my voice will always be with the people"**



GAUTAM PATOLE

budget are very disappointing.

Take something like the waiving of rural loans. When Devi Lal first waived loans up to Rs 10,000, there was a lot of criticism from the Congress. Then even Sharad Pawar did it. After that, the Janata Dal thought they should also do it. Now, suppose the BJP feels that they will raise the limit to Rs 25,000 and the CPI(M) to Rs 30,000 and so on. Where will it end?

I had asked V C Shukla about it. I said what is the guarantee that tomorrow the Congress doesn't make it Rs 50,000 and then you'll have to raise it even further. Then the CPI(M) will make it one lakh. And the BJP will make it two lakhs.

Finally, you'll have to come before the people and say (in Allahabadi accent) "Ham ka kare, coffers are empty" (laughs). And with due respect, Shukla had no answer to my question.

I've told this government, today, you don't talk about Rajiv Gandhi. Talk about yourselves. What are you doing? The election is over. Those issues are over. The people want you to perform.



**AB:** *Were you happy with the campaign?*

**SS:** For myself, yes. I told people at every dais, at every meeting, that I believe in a policy of attachment-detachment. I am attached to the people but I'm detached from the government.

I have asked for no favour from any politician. I want nothing for myself. I told the people that the moment this government stops performing, I will take your side against them also.

You were asking about the campaign. During the Assembly elections, I'm the one, on record, who told Mr V P Singh over telephone about the Bihar election: "Singh saheb, *yeh kya ho raha hai?*" You talk of value-based politics but what answer will you give the people when they ask about your choice of candidates?" And he said, "*Hum ka kare?*" Now our priority is Kashmir and Punjab."

So I told him, "Yes, Kashmir and Punjab are serious problems but I'm worried at the moment about Bihar. Look at your candidates. I hope that tomorrow we don't hear the sound of gunfire in the Assembly. We are used to shouting but now bullets will fly."

But I will be fair to Mr V P Singh. I do not say that he was being weak. That was a difficult phase for him. Some people had pressurised him so much and perhaps because of his maturity, he stayed out of the affair.

So to answer your question Amit, no, I am not very happy. But I am an optimist.

How did you feel about standing?

**AB:** *Well for me, it was a very emotional moment. I had never been interested in politics. I am not as qualified as you and I took the plunge for purely emotional reasons.*

*Actors campaign all over the world and many like you feel able to tell people which party to support. God bless you all but I no longer feel happy doing that.*

**SS:** I agree with you. An actor will always get a crowd. But that's all. In the Allahabad byelection, the Congress used an actor—let us take no names on the record—and he got a good turnout but he made no difference to the result.

At the last election, it was on the front page of every newspaper that Sridevi had campaigned for her father. Well, what happened? Her father lost his deposit.

But I am different. The people realised that by campaigning for the Opposition, I had everything to lose



**AB** If there was an election tomorrow, would you still campaign?

and nothing to gain. And don't forget, when I started out everybody said that the Congress was going to win.

At every meeting I said that if the Janata Dal was not upto the mark, I would oppose them also. You see, I don't belong to any party. I belong to the people. This is what made me different from the stars.

If you call Dilip Kumar, then people will listen. If you call Shatrughan Sinha, then people will listen. Even Raj Babbar, though I did not see him campaign, must have made some difference somewhere. But if you call Jeetendra, then people won't listen.

**AB:** *Well, I hadn't worked it out in the kind of detail that you obviously have but in my case, there was another emotional experience. In 1982, I had that accident and the kind of love I received from the people of India created a certain bond between them and me.*

*I made the mistake of thinking that fighting an election was the same thing. I didn't realise that by joining politics, I was asking them to choose.*

*It was a mistake and one I regret today. And anyway, I'm not even sure that my standing or campaigning made any difference. Whoever had stood from Allahabad at that election would have won exactly the same victory.*

**SS:** I agree and I differ with you. It may have been so in your case but this

time, the election was different. In 1984, nobody was risking his life or his business.

But this time, everywhere I went, people said, "Congress will win", and in spite of that I was campaigning. I said, never mind, even if they have money power, muscle power, we will still fight. My family members thought I was mad. My wife was so scared.

So I think that this time my campaign made a difference. The Janata Dal won because of our star campaigners: V.P. Singh, Devi Lalji, Chandra Shekharji, myself and others.

So many people have come up to me and said, "We were staunch Congress supporters till we heard you speak." Because they knew I was risking my life.

So, I agree with you that in 95 per cent of the cases, it doesn't matter. But if the people know that you are their representative, then, yes, a star campaigner can make a big difference.

**AB:** *I see. So if there was an election tomorrow, you would still campaign?*

**SS:** Campaign, yes. But for whom (laughs)?

I don't belong to the Janata Dal. I belong to the people. I'm not the party's private property. If tomorrow I find that the BJP's performance is better, I'll campaign for them. Why not? The BJP has shown a tremendous





## SS Campaign, yes. But for whom? I could even campaign for the BJP

amount of political maturity. And I have got tremendous confidence in my personal friend (Himachal CM) Shanta Kumar. And there are others I have supported like Patwari (MP, chief minister) and Bharon Singh Shekawat (Rajasthan CM).

**AB:** I don't want to turn this into a political interview but I'll give you a personal instance of this government's performance.

As you probably know, from the time they've taken office they've harassed me about one thing after another. I'm a person whose name has never appeared in any list of those with tax arrears.

Despite that, I've suddenly been slapped with a tax demand for over Rs 3 crores. It is an absurd demand backed by no evidence (smiles) and ignores the fact that no less a person than Mr Shatrughan Sinha has said that he keeps all his black money in my house!

**SS:** (Laughs) Maybe it is a joint demand!

**AB:** But it goes on, Shatru. They've opened up my files for ten years. They keep changing officers. And the officials send messages—off the record—to say, "We have nothing against Mr Bachchan but every morning we get a call from Delhi."

It gets worse. I get a notice every day. And the grounds are more and more

absurd. I gave an interview to SUNDAY in which I said I burned my hand in 1983. The notice includes a xerox of the interview and asks me how I paid for my medical treatment. How much I spent on medicines, etc.

**SS:** Oh really?

**AB:** Yes. I told Cine Blitz in an interview that I'd gone on the QE2 liner with my children in 1982. Now they've sent a xerox of that and want counterfoils of the tickets.

They've been to Breach Candy Hospital to find out who paid for my medicines during the 1982 episode. They are re-opening my brother's FERA case, 18 months after an adjudicated order was issued.

Well, I'd say that all this was vindictive. **SS:** This is certainly not what I've campaigned for. I don't support vindictiveness of any kind. And I have said this to everybody.

**AB:** Then you tell me why it is happening? I wrote to the Prime Minister saying

that if he had any evidence on Bofors, he should arrest me. He didn't even acknowledge the letter but a senior law ministry official—I won't take names but I think the country now knows what he's upto—goes around planting stories saying that my brother owns a sixth Bofors account.

But I'm tired of innuendo, Shatru and I have had a lot of it from this 'open government'. We are just suing for libel and letting the courts examine the evidence. Let's put an end to rumour and deal in hard fact.

**SS:** My reaction, Amit, is that no government should be vindictive. We've seen the results of it in the past. All charges should be substantiated. One minister told me, "What do you think the last government did with St Kitts and V.P. Singh's son? They put false charges on television."

My reaction was that was wrong. But two wrongs do not make a right. You shouldn't repeat the same thing.

**AB:** There is a small difference. Ajeya Singh's father wanted to become PM. My father has no such ambitions. But we get the persecution anyway.

**SS:** To my mind, everybody is innocent till proven guilty. And that's not just Ajeya Singh, Amitabh or Ajitabh. Even Hinduja or Bofors Chadha—what is his name—Win

Chadha. They are also innocent. And everybody should be allowed to come back. I've heard that Hinduja and Ajitabh will both be arrested at the airport. Now that is wrong. A man must be allowed to come to his own country.

**AB:** Yes, I forgot that. There's a red alert on Ajitabh Bachchan also. No charge; no evidence. Just victimisation.

**SS:** That is the point I am making. Forget Ajitabh. Even Bofors Chadha has a right to come back.

**AB:** And how much money is being spent by these so-called investigators on trips to Sweden to plant stories? How much expenditure is required to constantly tap my phones? To follow



GAUTAM PATIL

**AB**

Were you victimised by the last government?

**SS**

I'll be very honest. I've got a lot of mileage out of it, but no, I wasn't



**Ajitabh Bachchan in London?**

**Is this your government of the people?**

**SS:** That way they could say that even Arun Nehru was followed by the last government.

**AB: So is that your only justification?**

**SS:** No, no. I'm not saying two wrongs make a right. What I'm saying is that a fear psychosis has been created which is wrong. Leave aside Ajitabh, if I was Hinduja, even I would feel frightened to come to India. I would fight it till the end.

Everybody should be given a fair chance.

**AB: Where have I been given a fair chance?**

**SS:** That is what I'm coming to. Now, we are punishing people in three ways. First, you have trial by TV. Then trial by press. And finally, trial in the courts. This is very wrong!

In the case of Amitabh, I was speaking to somebody very important in the government and he told me, "It is not vindictiveness." I did this without your knowledge, Amit, but I said, "What are you doing opening up all his files?"

And they said, "You know, we are only undoing a wrong. Some officer was transferred because of him. He gave Rs 49 lakhs to Hinduja."

**AB: (Interrupts) Close to Rs 40 lakhs. And to a Hinduja medical charity which has recorded receiving the amount. And this was done in 1978 when the Janata government was in power. Anyway, what's wrong with giving money to charity?**

**SS:** Well, they said, "Why doesn't he give money to Breach Candy then?"

**AB: All right, because you've brought it up, I've given Rs 25 lakhs to Breach Candy. I just don't like broadcasting it. That's not why I give money to charity.**

**SS:** So, I said to this person: if you want to investigate his donation to Hinduja, please do it. But don't keep sending a notice a day. Let him not pay the price of being Amitabh Bachchan.

I have been talking to senior ministers in your support, Amitabh, but they feel they are undoing a wrong. I don't know how far it's true, but a very responsible minister told me that they were checking on your income tax.

**AB: A minister is responsible as long as he lasts. Then he is as irresponsible as you or me. I don't want to go into the income tax cases because we are chal-**



**AB** I found that despite people's expectations, I was really just another MP with no special ability to get things done

**lenging them legally. Any court will throw them out.**

**SS:** I agree. Because we still have an independent judiciary which I have faith in. It takes a lot of time but it is fair.

**AB: I'm sorry if this sounds crude, but at a time when Kashmir is in flames, your government is more interested in how Amitabh Bachchan burned his hand in 1983.**

**SS: (Laughs)** Good quote! But seriously, I do feel at times that

**Shatrughan Sinha at a BJP rally: "the party has shown political maturity"**



priorities are being mixed up. I've told them that their approach is confusing and confused. When the CBI investigated Jalappa or Sanjay Singh, it was abused. But today the same CBI is used for everything including the phone tapping enquiry. Why this selective approach?

It hurts me. I wonder what is happening!

To me, Amitabh Bachchan is innocent and everything they are saying has to be first substantiated and then proved in court before I will accept it.

**AB: How many people understand that, Shatru? How many people are as intelligent as you?**

**SS: Woh theek hai.** That is unfortunate. I don't get carried away by media but others might.

Leave aside Amitabh Bachchan, who is Amitabh Bachchan? I want to talk about somebody else. Some people might get a shock hearing this, but I want to say very clearly that Lalit Suri is my friend.

If Lalit is guilty, punish him. But stop raiding him. Stop torturing him when he's battling for his life. Don't kill him like this.

I'm not trying to support Lalit Suri. He's not my *mama*, he's just a friend. The laws apply to him and he must





**SS** I didn't fall into that trap. I could have won from any constituency: after all, when *lalloos* get elected, then why not Shatrughan Sinha?

answer to court. But he doesn't have to answer to media. To TV. To victimisation. To harassment.

I feel very hurt. He is lying in the intensive care unit. And they are harassing him. Raiding his house. Detaining his wife with questions.

And do you know how he got his first attack? A very senior bureaucrat called him up and said that if he didn't turn approver, they were going to pick up his wife and use third degree methods on her.

Most of the bureaucrats today are gutless, spineless people who have lost

their faith. What kind of officer is it who will serve a notice on Amitabh Bachchan and say, "Sorry sir, but I'm being pressurised by Delhi?"

**AB:** *Because he has his career to look after.*

**SS:** That is gutless. If he doesn't believe in the notice, he should refuse to serve it.

**AB:** *That's all very well but I have to reply to the notice.*

**SS:** You are paying the price for two things. For being Amitabh Bachchan.

And for being a friend of Rajiv Gandhi.

**AB:** *Were you victimised by the last government?*

**SS:** I'll be very honest. I've got a lot of mileage out of it but no, I wasn't. Except for a few humiliations, I have no complaints against the Congress.

In fact, only two actors were never raided: Amitabh Bachchan and Shatrughan Sinha.

I was never harassed and my personal contacts among bureaucrats were untouched. My only grudges were that my show was cancelled in Bihar and that I was banned from TV. But TV was K.K. Tewari. I don't think Rajiv Gandhi knew.

**AB:** (Dryly) *Well, that's not a problem now.*

**SS:** No, the other extreme is also very wrong. They cancelled your *Mili* to show my *Magroor*. I told Upendra that this shouldn't have been done. And anyway (laughs), at least they should have picked a good picture of mine.

**AB:** *These are small things.*

**SS:** But despite everything, I will have to say that I remain an optimist about this government.

All I will say is stop making excuses. The people think that the government is just buying time. You are not solving problems like Punjab or Kashmir by just repeating that you have inherited them from the Congress.

Nobody is interested in excuses. The people want performance. Otherwise they will turn against you as they turned against your predecessors.

And my voice will always be with the people. •

**AB**

How much expenditure is required to follow Ajitabh Bachchan in London?

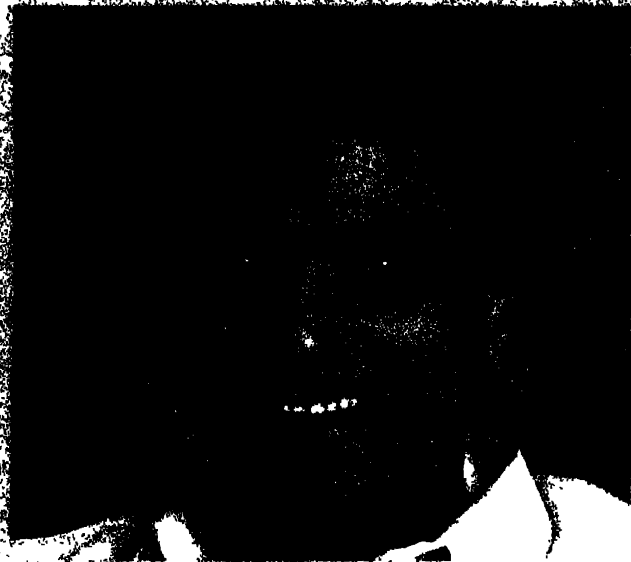


**SS**

That way they could say that even Arun Nehru was followed by the last government.



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**ECONOMY**

# Paying the price

*The consumers certainly are, but the Union budget could hurt the government more*

**I**f you are a salaried employee in a private or government organisation, chances are that you would be angry about at least one false promise the National Front (NF) made to lure you into voting for it last November—its commitment to check rising prices. You would be furious about paying more for tea, edible oil, sugar, pulses and just about everything that goes into stocking your larder or running the house. And you would definitely be livid about having to pay more for a bus journey, riding your two-wheeler to work, travelling by train or plane. All thanks to the NF government's budgetary demands, which do nothing to help its constituents—both urban and rural—especially the often-overlooked and always underestimated middle classes.

Citizens' anger—and its possible consequences for an already shaky government—has prompted political protest. The V P Singh administration's allies, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front have taken to the streets. Both political groups have led numerous demonstrations against the price rise, both to the Prime Minister's and finance minister Madhu Dandavate's residence. In fact, Dandavate had to face his wife Pramila's wrath in early May, when the lady, who is also a member of Parliament, led a band of angry, inflation-pinched housewives to their own house.

"The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) has increased by eight points, that is, five per cent, in just four months," says BJP MP Vijay Kumar Malhotra. "At this rate in two months we will have double digit inflation." Says Dipen Ghosh, a prominent CPI (M) MP. "The situation is bad and is getting worse. The government talks about credit control and other measures, but prices continue to rise."

These are difficult times. Prices begin to hurt not because they are higher than normal but because the rate of price increases outpaces the rate of growth in incomes. Especially in the past one year. On 21 April, a month after the Union budget was presented, the WPI (with a base of 100 at 1981-82 levels) — a dependable indicator of the government's control over the price line—stood at 172.4, an increase of almost nine per cent over the past year. And between the first week of January and the third week of April, the index jump was close to double the increase last year. "The Prime Minister himself has contributed to the mess," says Congress(I) MP and former revenue minister Ajit Kumar

Panja, "by talking of empty coffers, raising an alarm about war and reducing confidence in the economy, which only encourages hoarding and pushes up prices."

**T**he price rise has been concentrated around commodities of common consumption—sugar, groundnut oil, mustard oil, *vanaspathi*, wheat, pulses, potatoes, soap, cement and petroleum products such as petrol and high speed diesel. And the fact that it has all happened after the budget has led people to speculate that the hike is the direct result of reckless policy. (See interview with Madhu Dandavate on page 60.)

Analysts, however, are divided on

**Madhu Dandavate: no time for complacency**





this issue. While senior finance ministry officials argue that it is pure "disinformation" to attribute the price rise to the budget—tax provisions have only reduced the deficit and hence, had a calming effect on prices, they say—independent analysts maintain that the opposite is the case.

Prices remained stable in the first three months of the V P. Singh government. But they rose by 2.6 per cent in the two months following the budget. A rate, if maintained, would give the country an annual inflation of 16 per cent. "I don't think it (the rise) is going to continue," says D H. Pai Panandiker, secretary general of New Delhi-based Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). "But the government itself is largely responsible for the situation." With the average rate of inflation at a steady eight per cent—which even finance ministry officials concede is too high—feeling against the adminis-

**"I had two options. One was not to increase prices...the second was to tax the rich"**

tration's policy is mounting. Says B B Bhattacharya, an analyst with the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG). "We have to learn to live with ten per cent inflation."

The reasons? First, says Panandiker, the government raised the procurement price for the rabi crop, wheat prices, for example, were raised from Rs 183 per quintal to Rs 250. Next, increases in excise duties worth Rs 390 crores, and a Rs 835 crore hike in customs duties. Add on petrol price increases, a jump in railway freight charges and passenger fares, power tariff, the list goes on. These increases, says Panandiker, account for four-fifths of the reason behind the inflation, with just one-fifth attributable to market forces.

Industry, however, has its own explanations for the increase in the prices of sugar, cement and edible oils. The open market price of sugar is Rs 9.50 per kg, between Rs 1.50 to Rs 2 per kg more than early 1989 rates.

This year, there has been a bumper sugar crop, but the government raised the procurement price of sugarcane from Rs 22 per quintal to Rs 39 a quintal. In addition, state governments are imposing their own levies, complains Panandiker. The increased procurement price has added to the cost of production of sugar. "So, Rs 9.50 per kg is the correct price," says the FICCI official. On the edible oil front, there has been a shortage for

some time, he says, and "we cannot expect prices to be low." Imports are only a temporary measure and can never be a lasting solution, he says.

Some analysts, however, do not hold the present government responsible for the situation. Sudipto Mundle of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy would ascribe only 0.5 per cent of the overall inflationary trend to the budgetary

## "We will restrict prices"

*Finance minister Madhu Dandavate in conversation with SUNDAY*

**SUNDAY:** In its election manifesto, the National Front had promised to bring down prices. But the prices of essential commodities which affect the common man—edible oils, sugar, tea and pulses—are going up. How do you explain the situation?

**Madhu Dandavate:** Firstly, remember that when we took over, and when I presented my budget on 19 March (1990), there were certain financial constraints. For instance, on 1 December 1989, the deficit was Rs 13,790 crores. By the end of December, it was Rs 11,789 crores. External debt was Rs 83,000 crores, with the debt service ratio at 27 per cent. And for 1989-90, the interest on all borrowings which we were expected to pay was Rs 17,000 crores. Food stocks had dwindled to 11 million tonnes. Foreign exchange reserves at our disposal were enough to finance one and a half months' imports where a fair position would be three to four months. The balance of payment position was difficult. The wholesale price index (WPI) by the end of December had recorded an increase of six per cent and the annual rate of inflation was already touching eight per cent.

It was in this difficult situation that I had to formulate my budget. I had two options: one hard, one soft. One was not to increase prices of any sensitive commodities like petroleum products. That would mean allowing the deficit financing to go up. The second was to have

some resource mobilisation by taxing the rich, getting more taxes from the highly capital intensive companies and also trying to impose levies on some petroleum products. Of course, I have excluded kerosene, LPG (liquid petroleum gas), naphtha—which is required for fertilisers—low-speed diesel, furnace oil used in industry. If one could mobilise resources, the deficit could be reduced.

But either way, there was a possibility of rise in prices. If I had increased the prices of sensitive commodities, there would be a direct price rise. But if I mobilised resources by taxing the capital intensive companies, imposing levies on elitist consumption items and certain petroleum products and reduced the deficit, then I would have been able to curtail a tremendous price increase owing to a growth in the deficit. I must warn that if I had avoided the levies I had imposed in this budget, and if I were to reduce the resource mobilisation and allow the deficit financing to grow, prices would have risen steeply for the entire financial year. Don't forget that in the last budget, the deficit financing was to the tune of Rs 7,337 crores and in the revised estimate it had gone up to Rs 11,750 crores. I brought it down to Rs 7,206 crores. I concentrated on reducing the deficit.

It has no doubt caused a certain cascading effect and prices have gone up. But I must tell you very clearly that we will succeed in



hikes in petroleum products and railway freight. "The price rise from March to April this year," says Mundle, "was only marginally higher than the percentage rise for the same period last year."

Mundle points out that India has had to contend with a shortage of pulses for some time now, and the prices rose this year possibly because of a disruption in production. There is a buoyant export market for tea, and

controlling the prices of important commodities. Already, sugar prices have started going down.

Then tea. Before we took over, the former government had an arrangement with the Soviet Union regarding the export of a particular type of tea powder. We have informed the USSR that we would like to stagger this export. That will restrain tea prices. And in May, the fresh crop comes in. We have also given certain concessions and incentives to tea producers for investment, in this finance bill. That will also help production.

As far as cement is concerned, prices have gone up. But we have made an agreement which will take cement prices back to the pre-March level. Already, in the south they have come down. But because of the difficulty of wagon movement, in the north they are still high.

On salt, the problem is that more than half the quantity distributed is iodised salt, to avoid goitre. So the prices are high. We will have to find out whether we can subsidise it, because if iodisation is completely eliminated, I am not sure whether it will be good from the health point of view. We will try to strengthen the public distribution system.

Also, there is a clamour for giving better prices to agricultural produce. We have increased the price of wheat from Rs 183 per quintal to Rs 250 per quintal. Now, wheat is one of the important commodities in the basket that decides the price increase. That has also affected the situation.

**Q: The government has been issuing threats against hoarders. Is there any evidence that it has helped?**



**Petrol: hiking prices to reduce the import bill is just not working out**

**A:** We will see to it that firm steps are taken against those who are trying to resort to hoarding. I may tell you that the number of raids during 1990, upto April, have been 14,842 and the number of persons arrested has been 914. So the impression that we are not taking firm steps is wrong. And I am sure we will be able to restrict this menace.

**Q: You have banked on a smaller deficit financing to restrain prices. But what guarantee is there that it will not grow?**

**A:** I have given instructions to all ministries to cut down part of their expenditure. Second, every four months I will go before Parliament and report to it on our performance to check government expenditure, and at the same time, strengthen our tax collection machinery. With such monitoring every four months, I am confident we will be able to restrict spending.

I will give you one instance. When I was the railway minister (in 1977), after presenting the entire budget for the whole financial year, I broke up the budget into 12 parts. I fixed monthwise targets for expenditure and revenue. All months are not identical, some are lean, some better. Every month, I went

on monitoring the targets. As a result, while for the first year I had projected a surplus of Rs 80 crores, with this monitoring, I got a surplus of Rs 126 crores. I propose to follow the same method here. I hope, with the cumulative effect of all these measures, we will be able to restrict prices.

**Q: Our foreign exchange reserves are down to a month and a half of imports. If there is a bad monsoon, or hysteria over a war, or some such emergency, we will not be in a position to import food to hold the price line. Isn't the situation precarious?**

**A:** No, no. We have reoriented our entire import-export policy. And now our export results have begun to improve. There is already a 21 per cent increase in exports in terms of dollars. We will augment exports further. We have given a number of concessions in our export policy. We are giving a 25 per cent concession on import duty on those capital goods which are imported into the country for export-oriented industries, provided they are able to ensure a "treble export" obligation. This is bound to improve our foreign exchange reserves. ●



## The Wholesale Price Index (Base 100, 1981-82) for selected commodities

(WEEK ENDING)

|                    | 3 March, 1990 | 17 March, 1990<br>(2 days before budget) | 28 April, 1990 |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Pulses             | 200.8         | 202.8                                    | 214.4          |
| Oilseeds           | 163.8         | 163.4                                    | 171.1          |
| Edible oil         | 185.3         | 185.8                                    | 193.1          |
| Sugar, Gur         | 142.6         | 143.1                                    | 148.1          |
| Tea, Coffee        | 215.9         | 225.8                                    | 235.8          |
| Cement             | 150.7         | 150.7                                    | 170.1          |
| Beverages, Tobacco | 216.7         | 216.7                                    | 237.1          |

*A post-budget jump in prices, with the end nowhere in sight*

the resultant shortage within the country has pushed up tea prices. There has been a steep increase in the production of edible oil over the last few years, but this year production has dropped. Sometimes, says Mundle, "a small shortfall in production tends to get magnified in large price increases".

More serious, however, are the long-term effects of deficit financing, and increased money supply. "At the end of the last financial year, we had a record deficit of over Rs 10,000 crores," says IEG's Bhattacharya. The consequent increase in the money supply put an enormous pressure on prices. "But the effect of the deficit in this year's budget will not be felt before June or July," he says. This effect will be more pronounced if the country suffers a bad monsoon. After the drought in 1987, the country saw bumper harvests for two consecutive years. Foodgrains production touched a record 170 million tonnes in 1989-90. "And this year," says Bhattacharya, "the probability of a third bumper crop is low."

It is, of course, a bit early to be speculating about the rains. But Bhattacharya believes they will be critically important this year. If the rains are poor, the kharif crop, mainly rice, would be disastrous. And if that happens, there will definitely be trouble. Says Bhattacharya, "We don't have enough foreign exchange to import foodgrains this year. What is more, we don't even have the necessary buffer stocks."

The government's response to the situation has been somewhat jerky

and unrealistic. The measures consist basically of trying to curtail—more talk here than action—spending, mopping up money from the public and credit control. Bhattacharya, however, believes there is little scope for controlling government expenditure. Moreover, the government cannot mop up much more. It is already doing very well in the area of revenue mobilisation—especially from indirect taxes. However, direct tax collection could be improved.

What does make sense, say economists, is the government's threat to hoarders and blackmarketeers, which should yield results. A traditional way of countering hoarders is to import the

items they hoard and provide them to consumers. The Congress(I) government did this successfully when it imported palm oil and distributed it at prices way below prevailing market rates. Hoarders were forced to sell their stocks at competitive prices. "This year," says Bhattacharya, "we don't have the foreign exchange to try doing that."

**B**ut, Surendra Mohan, the Janata Dal ideologue who played a crucial role in drawing up the party's election manifesto, claims that the government's threats to hoarders and its price control measures are beginning to show results. Cement and sugar prices, he says, have already stabilised. A senior finance ministry official argues that the government's strategy of curbing the deficit expenditure and money supply, along with incentives for agricultural production, are sure to work. He says: "We are also committed to greater efficiency in the public sector." And adds, sarcastically and perhaps a little callously, "The problem is that people first demand higher salaries, then refuse to pay more for petrol, and expect you to keep the deficit under control."

Whatever the government's response, there will be limits to its efficacy—even the government knows it. "This is going to be a bad year for prices," prophesies a senior finance ministry official. •

**Nirmal Mitra/ New Delhi**

## SOFT DRINKS

# BVO alert

*India belatedly wakes up to a soft drink chemical's menace*

*"Brominated vegetable oils (BVO) are found to cause growth retardation, impaired food assimilation and enlargement of heart as also toxicity..."*  
—From a petition filed by the Consumer Unity Trust Society, Calcutta, to the National Commission for Consumer Grievance Redressal in 1989.

**F**or numerous soft drink consumers in the country, it has been a case of slow poisoning over the past four

decades. BVOs, used in varying quantities in virtually every citrus fruit-based soft drink, are—besides the cause cited in the petition—proven to be carcinogenic. Malaysia banned the substance 40 years ago, with the UK following 20 years after, but India woke up to its menace only in April this year.

Till 14 April, BVOs were used in every lemon and orange drink—from top-selling Limca, Tingler, Gold Spot,



Campa Orange, Tripp, to a host of minor brands. Plus, in soft drink concentrates such as Rasna. Even now, more than a month after the government banned BVOs, there is a raging controversy about which soft drink manufacturer continues to use the chemical. And Parle, the makers of Limca, Thums Up and Gold Spot, tops the list of suspects.

But there is a strange twist to the game, with manufacturers playing off one against the other, and the government at its inefficient and confused best. On 14, 17 and 19 April, government agencies conducted several tests on soft drinks, and then publicly declared that soft drinks manufactured by Pure Drinks—Campa Orange and Tripp—and Rasna, manufactured by Pioma Industries Ltd, contained BVOs. Curiously, Parle and its Limca and Gold Spot brands were not included. All thanks to some fancy footwork by the company.

When the media first picked up the BVO refrain in the beginning of April, spurred on by consumer group petitions, Parle moved in with a 'public interest' advertising blitz in most national newspapers, claiming that its drinks did not contain BVOs. This tactic stymied the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC), which moved with its usual ham-handed inefficiency. The agency issued injunctions against all the soft-drink manufacturers (based first on newspaper reports), but left Parle out because the company had issued ads saying its drinks were BVO-free.

"When we first tested the drinks," says a senior MRTPC official who declines to be identified, "we couldn't take any action as the health ministry itself had permitted it (BVOs) then. We can't do anything much even now, because we have to go according to what the companies tell us. If tomorrow, a company comes and tells us that their drinks are free from BVO, we have to believe them."

What happened was that the MRTPC first believed Parle, then later, when test results came in, reversed its opinion. And last week, Union energy and civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan, said in Parliament, that Parle drinks such as Limca and Gold Spot continued to use BVOs after the mid-April ban. By then, of course, it was a bit late to go about lambasting Parle, which, besides being the number one soft drink manufacturer in the country, also has



**BVO or summer thirst: a difficult choice**

some heavyweight influence in the government, courtesy its chairman, Ramesh Chauhan.

Parle, for its part, claims that it stopped using BVOs in January this year, a full three months before the ban came into effect. Instead, the company blames the government's faulty testing procedures. "What is required," says Thomas Chandy, commercial manager with Parle in New Delhi, "is the sophisticated gas liquid chromatography test. The government has obviously not used it." Chandy also cites tests conducted by the Delhi-based Shriram Institute of Industrial Research, which has cleared the Parle drinks. Whether Parle's

assertion is correct or not, the fact is that the company has done such a wonderful job of snowing public opinion with its own version of the story, that it is very difficult to figure out who exactly is telling the truth.

**A**nd in this confusion, soft drink manufacturers are gunning for each other, trying to use the BVO issue to block the competitors' sales in the thirsty summer months. Parle's arch-enemy Pure Drinks, for instance, says a senior company executive, "Why doesn't the government take action against them (Parle)?" We are losing out on our market, as Tripp, for instance, has become a colourless drink (BVOs are used to impart a cloudy, off-white colour to lemon drinks). Consumers are wondering what is happening. All the while, Parle is keeping up this holier-than-thou image. The implication is that Pure Drinks have pulled out BVO, while Parle continues using it.

In turn, Parle is hell-bent on destroying Pepsi Foods Ltd and its offering, Leher-Pepsi. Officials circulated photocopies of a letter purportedly written by US-based PepsiCo Inc to the Indian health service department, requesting clearance to use BVO in its Indian drinks.

This squabbling has effectively suppressed the real issue, BVO. Well, as far as the general public is concerned, anyway. Says S R Khanna, an official

### Break-up of the Rs 900 crore soft drink market

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| <b>Colas</b>         | <b>40%</b> |
| <b>Lemon drinks</b>  | <b>31%</b> |
| <b>Orange drinks</b> | <b>19%</b> |
| <b>Others</b>        | <b>10%</b> |

In metro cities, lemon drinks account for 41 per cent of the sales, colas follow with 39 per cent, and orange drinks with 16.5 per cent.

(Source: Operations Research Group, 1989)



# What goes in...

The following is the list of what really goes into a carbonated beverage, a chemical cocktail.

## 1. Water

## 2. Preservatives:

- a) Sodium benzoate
- b) Potassium sorbate

## 3. Stabilisers:

- a) Purity gum (starch)

## 4. Acids:

- a) Citric (citrus general)
- b) Malic (apple, other fruit flavours)
- c) Phosphoric (in colas, root beer)

## 5. Flavouring agents:

- a) Flavouring oils
- b) Weighting agents (BVO, estergum)
- c) BHA or Tenox

## 6. Colouring agents:

- a) FD & C colours
- b) Beta, Carotene, Caramel

## 7. Other Preservatives:

- a) Sorbic acid
- b) Ascorbic acid
- c) Staneous chloride

## 8. Other additives:

- a) Water soluble flavours
- b) Caffeine

(Source: Emulsion format submitted to the Central Committee for Food Standards in 1988, by Parle Ltd.)

of the New Delhi-based Voluntary Organisation in the Interest of Consumer Education. "The ban came into effect more than a month ago, why should it take them (the government) so much time to implement it, particularly when the guilty have also been named?"

It would appear that the ball is squarely in the government's court. The Centre, as well as the state governments, will have to police the ban in tandem, but no one really



**Pure Drinks chairman Charanjit Singh: clearly gunning for Chauhan**

seems to be in a hurry to do so. While the Delhi Administration is planning to initiate legal action against Parle, it is not sure when exactly it will do so. "The case will go to the metropolitan magistrate in charge of prevention of food adulteration cases," says P N Gupta, an official with the Prevention of Food Adulteration department of the Delhi Administration.

The lackadaisical attitude of government agencies persists even after a ten-year battle to get BVOs banned in India. The Central Committee for Food Standards (CCFS), comprising scientists and representatives of consumer protection groups, had started investigations in 1979. But while concluding that BVOs should be discontinued, the CCFS conceded that there were no substitutes available. "Attempts have been made to use other substitutes (for BVO)," says a 1988 British Standards Institute report. "Propylene, diabenzote, glycerol, estergum of wood resin to help maintain uniform appearance (in soft drinks). However, none have been accepted as being free from

long-term effects." BVOs are banned in 129 countries. The US permits its use on a limited basis, 15 parts per million (ppm).

In 1988, Parle submitted to the CCFS that it uses 70 to 125 ppm of BVO, or 70 mg of BVO for every litre of beverage. But now, it denies ever having mentioned it. "Even before we switched over to fatty acids in January this year," says a Parle official who declines to be identified, "we used only 30 ppm of BVO." Parle officials



**Parle boss Ramesh Chauhan: in a spot**

claim that fatty acids are a safe substitute, but government agencies are not so sure. It is trying out estergum as a possible substitute, but this is contradicted by medical research in the UK.

As of now, the soft-drink lobby is the clear winner. Besides, it has won the BVO battle once before. In 1988, when the government issued a notification banning BVOs, the powerful lobby managed to get it deferred by two years, on the grounds that it is still searching for a substitute. The two years are up, and the controversy has surfaced yet again. And going by the past record of government action in health safety measures, the lobbyists could come through clean once more. Right now, the lobby is fractured, with competitors gunning for each other. But in a few months—or even weeks—when the BVO issue quiets down a bit, life—for the soft drink manufacturers—will go on. And life, for the consumers, will continue to be coloured by a deadly chemical cocktail. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



## ■ A new order

The succession is complete at Hindustan Lever Ltd (HLL). A.S. Ganguly, Lever's hard-driving, fast-paced chairman, formally stepped down, giving way to his vice-chairman for the last two years, and his protege, S.M. Datta. Ganguly goes on to join the Unilever board as a director. Ganguly orchestrated HLL's taking over management of Brooke Bond, Lipton and Ponds in India, after the parent company, Unilever, merged with and bought out their international principals, catapulting the company into the country's largest consumer products company, with a



**S.M. Datta: tough legacy** combined sales turnover of Rs 2,440 crores. Datta will be picking up from where Ganguly left off—with HLL's Rs 230 crore liquid alkylene benzene project, and an expansion of its trading and export activities. It should be interesting to see how Datta handles the competition, Nirma Chemical Works, Lever's detergent nightmare, and the fast-emerging Procter & Gamble, which should give Lever a run for its money in the personal health product segment. Ganguly barely contained them. And his protege will

## STOCK QUOTE

**"Lucky V.P. Singh. He has his own plane."**

*A harried businessman on the Prime Minister's insistence on keeping the Airbus A320s grounded*

have to give his best to keep the competition that way.

## ■ It's raining dividends

That's Bajaj Auto Ltd's style this year. Rahul Bajaj's flagship company has declared a mind-boggling 110 per cent dividend this year (the standard is 10 to 20 per cent for the corporate world), making its share prices jump by Rs 50 to Rs 465 in a single day's trading last week. Bajaj has reasons to be happy: his benevolence is probably due to a remarkable performance in the past couple of years. The two-wheeler giant's sales have now crossed the Rs 1,000 crore level, to close at Rs 1,064.76 crores for the year-ending March 1990, an almost Rs 400 crore jump from the previous year. Net profit has more

than doubled, to Rs 65.14 crores for the same comparative period. And Bajaj Auto continues to be the undisputed number one of the two-wheeler industry. The company



**Rahul Bajaj: rain god**

may have overdone it a bit with its record dividend announcement—it merely serves to raise investor and consumer expectations, for a still

better gift next year. On the other hand, Bajaj probably has a trick or two up his sleeve. Expansion, or new projects, perhaps? Keeping the crowds happy always helps.

## ■ Spinning exports

It's the Indian textile industry's obvious way out, and the Bhilwara Textile Group, perhaps following in Arvindbhai Lalbhai's footsteps,

## PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK

### L.C. Jain, former Planning Commission member



- The Magsaysay award winner and champion of the voluntary organisations' cause turned in his papers last week, saying the carnage at Meham was too much to handle. A non-economic motive, but Jain's departure from the Commission will certainly lead to a reorientation of sorts.

Jain was the prime mover behind the budget's misguided employment generation schemes and its stress on handloom weavers, both pet Jain topics. With the dedicated Gandhian's exit, the Commission and its policies could turn to more pressing problems—poverty, power and industry, for a start.

agrees—export, and survive. Rajasthan Spinning and Weaving Mills, part of the Rs 200 crore Rajasthan-based Bhilwara group of companies, has made a small, but significant, move. The company will be exporting US \$ 1,00,000 worth of cotton knitwear to the lucrative US market. This is obviously part of a larger corporate design. The outfit has set up a knitwear plant in Jammu, in technical collaboration with French company Davanlay, the makers of the Lacoste range of sports and casualwear. Bhilwara has also hooked an ex-Brooks Brothers executive as its NRI agent in the US. With such a project pedigree, all Bhilwara has to do is hold on to its intent.



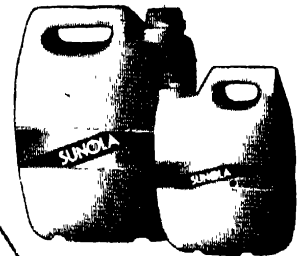
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# Bear necessities

*Street-entertainers stand up for their rights*

**F**rom the streets of gay Paris to the grim confines of the Delhi zoo, Munna has come a long way. And now, this wonder bear of the Festival of India in France, has hit the headlines again.

Munna was picked up by officials of the environment ministry on 1 May, minutes before a performance in the congested Karampura area of Delhi on grounds that he was being ill-treated and would be better off in the zoo, under state supervision. Since then, Munna has been kept in solitary confinement in the zoo, and after refusing food for five days, is now on a frugal diet of bread and water.

In the zoo, we find a hapless creature. He is suffering from corneal opacity, which leads to blindness. His teeth have been removed and his nails have been cut. "Munna was obviously being ill-treated. He can't eat fruit or climb trees like other bears," says a zoo official. His owners had obviously handicapped him to make the exhibition wrestling safe for humans. Moreover, Munna's half-blind state today, is the result of long years of neglect, say the zoo doctors.

On the other side of the fence are Naseer Khan and his wife Habeeban, for whom Munna is the only source of income. With Munna behind bars, Naseer and his 40-member family have been left penniless. They allege that the zoo authorities are solely responsible for Munna's eye infection. "He is like our child," says Naseer, "if he could speak, he would tell you that he is missing us and is very unhappy." Maneka Gandhi has no business taking away his livelihood from him, he adds.

This is not Naseer's first fight to keep Munna. In 1984, the forest ministry in Rajasthan put Munna in

the Jaipur zoo. Only after a Rajasthan court order, was the bear returned to them. French environmentalists were moved by Munna's plight, too, "kidnapping" him in Paris and returning him only when forced to by the authorities.

Naseer and Habeeban are not the only ones worried about Munna's future. With them are the hundreds of *madaris* who depend on their performing animals for survival. Terrified that their animals will also be taken away

residence, the next day it is former Congress MP Dharamdass Shastri heading a delegation to Maneka Gandhi's house. The question is the same—by what right has the environment ministry taken away these people's only source of livelihood?

Thousands of people in the country live off their animals, be it from performing animals like bears or functional animals like bullocks. "Can the government afford to take away their animals from them, without offering them an alternative source of liveli-



**A demonstration outside the PM's residence to protest the capture of Munna the bear: a struggle for survival**

from them, they have been appealing to anyone who cares to listen. Together with their performing monkeys, bears, snakes and birds, the *madaris* have taken to the streets in the city, their ire squarely focussed on the "brash and impulsive" minister of state for environment, Maneka Gandhi. Besides demonstrating outside her residence, they have also protested outside the Prime Minister's house, urging him—in vain, it seems—to intervene.

"Concern" for these people has cut across party lines. If one day local Janata Dal leader Dharendra Pratap leads a demonstration to the PM's

hood?" asks Dharendra Pratap. "Are you going to preserve wild life at the cost of human life?" demands a memorandum submitted to the PM. "If Maneka can have pet dogs, why can't Naseer have a pet bear?" questions Abdul Latif, who depends on his monkeys for survival.

The issue poses a veritable Hobson's choice—a family's survival versus an animal's life. And, for the animal itself, it is a choice between a life behind bars, as a show-piece for zoo visitors, and a life performing for the same visitors, but with the freedom to move around in chains. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



**T**here are now very real fears in New Delhi that India and Pakistan may go to war over the next two months. The Indian position is that Pakistan has already declared war by training and arming the Kashmiri militants. So, if India chooses to respond with a full-scale military invasion, then it will only be taking defensive action (Pakistan used a variation of this argument in 1971).

For two months now, the Cabinet has debated the war option, but such hawks as Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammad Khan have been countered by doves like George Fernandes and Inder Gujral. And while the BJP has been pushing for some offensive action (a raid on training camps in Pakistan, for instance), Prime Minister V.P. Singh has, till now, been unwilling to commit himself either way.

But, judging by the hawkish tone of his recent public utterances, the Raja seems to be on the verge of deciding in favour of war. Those who have spoken to him recently say that his conversation centres around references to the military balance and the need to tell the Pakistanis to lay off. And there are disturbing reports about the defence forces being pushed into an advanced stage of preparedness.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that war is imminent. For one, the Indian show of aggression may just be an offensive posture designed to frighten the Pakistanis into scaling down their assistance to the Kashmiri militants.

And for another, it is not easy for two countries to go to war if both the super-powers are intent on maintaining peace. Last week, President Bush decided to send an emissary to the subcontinent to urge India and Pakistan to pull back. And the Russians have made it very clear that the last thing they want is an Indo-Pak war. As Inder Gujral never tires of repeating, it makes no sense to go to war at a time when the rest of the world is opting for peace.

**N**evertheless, there are reasons why the idea of a war appeals to members of this government.

- Many ministers believe that Pakistan has never forgotten the humiliations of 1971 and now seeks to avenge itself on India by creating trouble in key border states. Punjab and Kashmir, for instance. If India does not act, Pakistan will destabilise other states as well.



The Pakistani flag is burnt in New Delhi: is war imminent?

# Apocalypse, never

*Don't be fooled by the hawks: a war  
will solve nothing*

- At present, Pakistan is fighting a low-cost proxy war. This is a war it cannot really lose because the Indian response is directed against the people of Kashmir, not at Pakistan.

But once India converts this into a full-scale war, the Pakistanis will at last feel the heat themselves.

- Pakistan is still undergoing the painful transition from martial law to democracy. If India attacks now and inflicts a crushing defeat, it will be the psychological equivalent of the 1971 humiliation. Then, it took Pakistan a dozen years to recover (if you accept that it began seriously interfering in Punjab in 1983). One more defeat and India is okay for another ten years.

All these reasons are regularly trotted out at Cabinet meetings and advanced in public by members of government-sponsored think-tanks. They have some merit but nobody talks—on the record at least—about another, more cynical reason for going to war.

- As India's problems begin to seem more and more unmanageable and V.P. Singh's minority government seems less and less able to come to grips with the situation, war offers a political escape route.

Past experience suggests that Indians always unite behind a war-time government and push all other problems to the back of their minds. Regardless of the mayhem in Meham, the fires that nobody can explain or the FIRs that nobody can understand, V.P. Singh would suddenly emerge as a great leader who could count on the backing of the entire country. It worked for Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Raja's mentor. And it could work again.

**O**r could it? While nobody seriously expects 1990 to be akin to 1971, many think that the least that India could hope for would be a repetition of the 1965 experience when the war was inconclusive and both countries





Anti-India demonstration in Kashmir: a war will not assuage feelings

claimed victory

Such a scenario, runs the argument, is not perfect, but would still work to the advantage of the National Front government. War has a way of silencing critics and even if the result is a 1965-type stalemate, Rajiv Gandhi would seem like a traitor if he dared question the government's claims of victory (In 1965, too, everybody accepted the official position that India had won)

But while this seems plausible enough on paper, the hypothesis rests on several key assumptions:

- That war would be swift. If India makes its gains quickly, then the nation will unite behind the regime. If, however, the war drags on, then dissension is certain to grow within the Cabinet itself and it will prove impossible to act coherently or decisively.

- That India's prospects would not be damaged by the willingness of much of the population of Kashmir to side with Pakistan (In 1971, the readiness of the East Pakistanis to assist India helped us win.)

- That once the war was over and India had won, the Kashmir problem would be solved

- That Indians are so angry with Pakistan's meddling in Kashmir that they don't mind the high cost of a war (around Rs 600 crores a day at the *minimum*) or grudge the loss of lives.



■ **Everybody believes that Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will never allow a conflict to go nuclear, but what about those who back her? The generals in Pakistan?**



V.S. RAMANATHAN

■ **Judging by the hawkish tone of Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh's recent public utterances, the Raja seems to be on the verge of deciding in favour of war**

None of these assumptions is based on anything like certainty. And there are good reasons for questioning nearly every single one of them. For a start, the war would not be quick. Every military expert (and this includes the hawks) says that it will probably go on for 15 days or more. Then, the fact that the population of Kashmir is hostile (as are many of those who live in the border areas of Punjab) is certain to damage the morale—to say nothing of the efficiency—of the Indian Army. Moreover, even if India did defeat Pakistan decisively, it would not necessarily solve the Kashmir problem. The Kashmiris allege that New Delhi is anti-Muslim and imposes its will on them by force. They want independence, not union with Pakistan. How will it help if India thrashes Pakistan? It would still be perceived in Srinagar as anti-Muslim and intent on the use of force.

And finally, even if the war does succeed in restoring law and order to Kashmir, will it have been worth the cost? Isn't a minimum of Rs 1,000 crores and thousands of lives lost a rather high price to pay for ending day-time curfew in Srinagar?

And there are other—even more compelling—reasons for questioning the wisdom of the hawks. All this talk of 1965 and 1971 scenarios implicitly assumes that a 1990 war would be similar in effect. It takes it for granted that the war would be confined to the borders and that the only role played by the rest of the country would consist of sticking dark paper on windows and egging on our brave *jawans*. This is a dangerously naive belief.

A war this year would not be a limited engagement. India would seek to crush Pakistan. And Pakistan would know that it was fighting for its very survival. So, neither side would pull its punches.

Certain consequences would then follow.

- Both sides would resort to large-scale bombing of civilian areas. In



1971, the Pakistanis found it difficult to send their planes to Bombay from Karachi. But now, with the F-16s, they could go much further and take the war into the drawing-rooms of those who have, so far, regarded it as a largely intellectual activity.

- Even if both sides decided to be good and promised not to bomb civilian targets, they would still attack key installations that were many miles from the front. Three years ago, the Rajiv Gandhi regime reinforced the casing of our nuclear power plants to ensure that they remained immune to bombing. Since then, Pakistan has acquired new missiles that could prob-

ably explode through the casings and get the reactors.

that neither V.P. Singh nor Benazir Bhutto will ever allow a conflict to go nuclear, but what about those who back them? The generals in Pakistan? The BJP? Devi Lal and Om Prakash Chautala?

Those who push for war on the grounds that Kashmir is the cornerstone of our secularism miss an even more obvious point. At each India-Pakistan confrontation (even a cricket match, but certainly a war), Hindus check to see which side Muslims are on. In 1965 and 1971, the Muslims proved beyond a doubt that they had no loyalties to Pakistan. In 1990, they will do so again.

With one significant exception.

The Muslims of Kashmir are bound to support the Pakistanis—of this, there can now be no doubt. Such support, at a time when the atmosphere is surcharged with jingoism and nascent Hindu communalism, will be the flame that sets off a major conflagration. It will give Hindu chauvinists the opportunity they need to question the loyalty of *all* Muslims and turn against them.

Can our secularism survive such an explosion of hatred?

**T**he problem with the hawks is that they fail to realise that even if India wins, we could all still lose. The cost in lives and resources is quantifiable. But who knows how many urban areas will be reduced to rubble? How many oil installations bombed? How many nuclear reactors brought to the brink of disaster?

And what about the greatest loss—one that is unquantifiable? What happens if a war succeeds in 'confirming' to the Hindu communalists that most Muslims have loyalties to Pakistan? At that stage, nobody will be prepared to listen to those who will explain that the Kashmiris are different and that their behaviour is in no sense typical of Indian Muslims. And once such an ugly outbreak of communal hatred takes place, will any Muslim feel secure again in India?

These are costs that we will have to pay even if, at the end of 20 days of pitched combat, the Pakistani Army surrenders. (Never mind the cost if we lose.) And what will we have gained in the process? Kashmir will remain hostile. Its people will continue to be sullen. Only a few thousand militants will no longer get arms from Pakistan. Is it all worth it?

The danger with arguing for peace in the present context is that it can sometimes be mistaken for defeatism. That is not the purpose of this exercise. If Pakistan attacks us, then we must fight and defend our sovereignty—regardless of the cost.

But if there is a war, it won't be for that reason. It will be caused simply because a minority government in New Delhi isn't quite sure how best to restore law and order to a state. There are many circumstances in which it is worth sacrificing lives and a decade's worth of economic development and risking our secular consensus.

But political ineptitude is not one of them. •

**Vir Sanghvi**



**Destruction caused by the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict: in 1990, even if India wins, we could still lose**

ably explode through the casings and get the reactors.

Even if this does not happen, there are lots of other targets that are sitting ducks: a single successful bombing sortie and the oil installations at Bombay High could turn into internos.

- Though nobody in India wants to talk about it, a war between two countries that are perched on the edge of the nuclear precipice always runs the risk of suddenly escalating out of control. Indian intelligence estimates that Pakistan has between three and six nuclear devices. We are only one screwdriver turn away from arming our own bombs. Everybody believes

**As India's problems begin to seem more and more unmanageable and V.P. Singh's minority government seems less and less able to come to grips with the situation, war offers a political escape route**



AREY, BECAUSE  
THE **b** \* \* \* \*  
TRUTH  
INVOLVES  
US  
ALL!

CHAUTHALA  
FOR EDITOR,  
INDIAN EXPRESS





# A letter to Doordarshan

*Despite its tall promises, the NF has done little about giving autonomy to the electronic media*



My dear director general,

Saw your chap on the telly the other day. The funny little man with the funny fur cap. You can always tell him by his mumble. He said that if I was

sick of seeing too much of him on the screen I should drop you a postcard.

Good of him to let me know—and that too just in the nick of time because you *are* director general (DG) this month, even though they sent you out on long leave till last month and God knows what they'll be doing to you next month. Their problem with you is that the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)—an independent, autonomous body of the kind they say they want to have run Doordarshan—selected you as DG, out of a panel of several names, as the most experienced, able and professional of the candidates. Unfortunately, the UPSC did this when Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister. Which makes you, in their eyes, a Rajiv Gandhi man. And, therefore, to be trifled with till they get the opportunity of turning you out. So much for "value-based" administration.

Anyhow, while you're still there (and, let me comfort you, while they're still there) let's take our PM seriously and drop each other postcards. The real problem is, how to compress one's woes into a single postcard? I would need an entire serial—93 episodes, perhaps, if the cut the NF *dalals* demand is reasonable—to really pour out my heart. But let's, at any rate, kick off.

Ever since Independence, previous regimes have made it clear that the electronic media (Akashvani and Doordarshan) is a government-owned, government-run, government-monopoly and, as such, responsible through the minister of I&B to Parliament and through Parliament to the people. (The Janata interregnum of

1977-79 began by claiming it was different, but provided the general public with so much entertainment through its live-shows that no one much noticed them watering the milk of autonomy!) The revolutionary change which the Prasar Bharati Bill brings is to keep the electronic media a government-owned, government-run, government-monopoly but absolve the minister of I&B of responsibility to Parliament. And absolve Parliament of its accountability to the people! Democracy *zindabad*!

Responsibility to Parliament and accountability to the people are the essence of democracy. The Rajiv government's handling of Doordarshan was repeatedly—and, sometimes, I hold, deservedly—criticised on the floor of the House. That is called responsibility. It was one of the big issues bruited about at the last elections. The Rajiv regime fell. That is accountability.

If V.P. Singh and clapper-boy Upendra were prepared to privatise the electronic media and let Nushi Wadia—and the other moneybags who finance them—run different privately-owned TV channels and stations, then it would be reasonable to say that the networks would be responsible and accountable to their shareholders, not to the general electorate. The Prasar Bharati Bill keeps Doordarshan firmly in the public domain. What the Man in the Fur Cap and his shy, blushful minister of I&B (men so modest and retiring that it is only with the greatest reluctance that they order their cameramen to follow them wherever they go) want to ensure is that they continue running

the show from behind the scenes, take a bow in the wings for whatever applause they might garner, and blame it all on others for anything that goes wrong.

The fact is that what the NF is after is not autonomy but the democratisation of the expenditure of hundreds of crores of public money. For if it is genuine autonomy it seeks then what is it that has stopped them all these months from giving full functional autonomy to Doordarshan's news and current affairs division? No legislation is required to give this division its freedom. Yet the NF government has changed the head of this division no less than three times in six months—and all because the puppet it put in turned out to have a broken string! So much, once again, for "value-based" administration.

**T**he Congress made no bones about its conception of the role of the





electronic media. It did not envisage the electronic media as a kind of pale imitation of the "freedom" of information and expression as exercised in the privately-owned print media. It saw the electronic media in terms of "nation-building" (and, yes, paid the price for this at the polls).

The NF, on the other hand, hoodwinked the people into believing that, in the name of freedom, it would convert Doordarshan into a cross between the *Indian Express* and *Savvy*, so a grateful public panting for pulchritude—political or personal, provided only that it titillates, and to hell with the truth—put V.P. Singh into the Prime Minister's *gaddi* and Upendra into Shastri Bhawan.

Since V.P. Singh knows everything about image-building (and little about nation-building) in the first few heady weeks of power, Doordarshan was told to adopt the "investigative reporters" and "fearless commentators" of the press as its role models. So, instead of telling the country the larger truth of the terrible long-term consequences to nation-building of the wholly unnecessary release of five top criminals in exchange for Rubaiya, Doordarshan turned its cameras on the more immediate journalistic truth of the victory celebrations of the ter-

rorists and secessionists in Srinagar's Lal Chowk. The result was the biggest morale booster that terrorism in India has ever received. We are living today with the consequences of electronic journalism playing to the gallery with no regard for the national interest.

Perhaps, even then, the NF could have persisted with its experiment in letting it all hang out. We have learnt from experience that wrapping up uncomfortable truths by pretending they do not exist does not drive them away.

If "freedom" not "nation-building" is, indeed, to be the leitmotif of Doordarshan, surely its news reporters should have been told to visit the families of Mushir-ul-Haq and Khera to ask them *on camera* whether they had seen the Mufti feeding *laddoos* to the Prime Minister when *his* daughter had been released?

Or, if that is too much for our "liberals" to stomach, why not a TV confrontation between Jagmohan and George Fernandes on who precisely is making a mess of things in Kashmir? Or sending a team to Devi Lal the day he resigned to tell the country what exactly he thinks of V.P. Singh? Or to Jaipal Reddy, on the day V.P. Singh let him down, to ask what exactly *he* thinks of his one-time patron and mentor?

Other story ideas Kuchchi Devi on the Thakurs of Fatehpur and how comforted she feels over one of their ilk being her MP in Parliament. Or Kerala chief minister Nayanar discussing rape over a cup of tea. Or a phone-in interview with Hegde on techniques of telephone-tapping. Or Anand Singh Dang's wife (or is she his widow? For, at the time of writing, even she does not know whether Chautala has left her husband alive or not) graphically describing the atrocities to which she and her children had been subjected by the family of the "founder of the National Front" (V.P. Singh's phrase) and carefully chosen *Upa-Pradhan Mantri* of the value-based NF government.

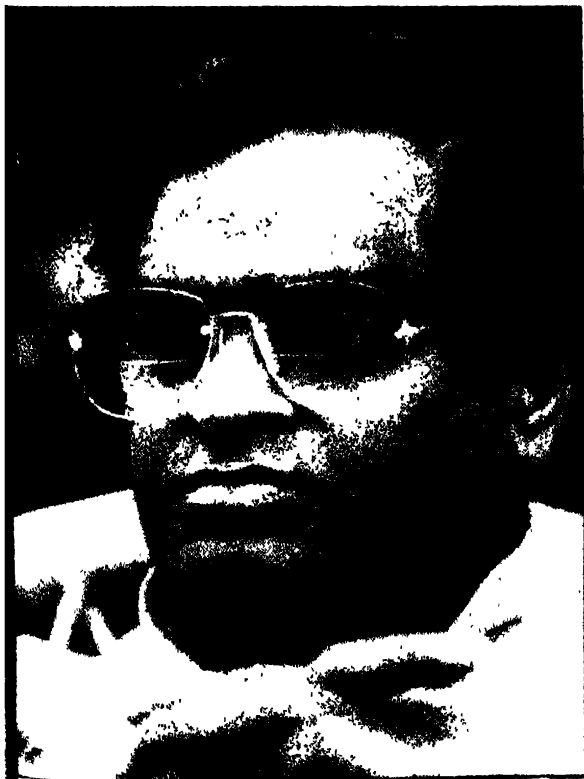
Or, maybe, we could get S.K. Singh to tell us about foreign policy under Gujral. Or Sam Pitroda on Unni. And—why not?—Unni on Sam Pitroda. Would not viewers wish S.S. Dhanoo to share with us his thoughts on being so unceremoniously kicked out of the Election Commission? Or even, Mr director general, yours on what it feels like to be kept cooling your heels, when you have only 15 months left before superannuation to bring to Doordarshan the distilled results of 35 years of professional expertise in broadcasting and telecasting?

One more theme and I am through. A weekly serial called "Broken Promises", featuring interviews with *kisans* whose loans have not been waived, unemployed youths brandishing their 'Right to Work', ex-servicemen who have still to receive equal pension for equal rank, and not victims telling us how they are faring under the NF-BJP brand of secularism?

Instead, what do we get? Endless clips of Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan reading out the clichés written for them by their joint secretaries, now, don't jump up and ask: what did you lot do when you were in office? The answer is: exactly what this lot is doing now! The difference is that the Congress did what it said it would do. The NF, on the other hand, is doing what it said it would change.

Actually, in the last elections, the Congress, learning from its past mistakes, had promised what was feasible: functional autonomy. The NF bypasses the essential and, as usual, goes in for institutional tinkering.

The real requirement of Doordarshan is not institutional autonomy but functional autonomy, and functional



**V.P. Singh (left) and P. Upendra:** *they want to ensure that they continue running the show from behind the scenes, take a bow in the wings for whatever applause they might garner, and blame it all on others for anything that goes wrong*



autonomy can be effectively exercised only by a thoroughly professional organisation. The hardware expansion of Doordarshan far outpaced the professionalisation of its personnel. That is why Doordarshan engineers are world-class but their programme personnel are still, by and large, the pits. Till now, Doordarshan's news and current affairs division have been staffed by guys and dolls who could not even make it in journalism and have got to where they are by knowing how to grease the IAS with the only lubricant the IAS really enjoys—flattery.

In the initial phase, there was little alternative to letting an asymmetry develop between the physical infrastructure and programme personnel because it was only after the network was in place that there was really a career to be made in TV news and current affairs. Now, at last, commencing 1988, the first batch of reporters was recruited who are going to make a life-time profession of TV reporting.

The real problem before Doordarshan is not how to keep V.P. Singh off the small screen but how to ready ourselves for the technological challenge that is inevitably coming—probably within the next decade—of TV sets in India being able to receive transmissions direct from anywhere in the world, not just hazy drawingroom dramas from Pakistan in the border districts of Punjab but TV transmissions from Washington and Moscow, Tehran and Beijing, Dhaka and Colombo. It will have a staggering impact on our lives, on our polity, on our society, on our economy, on our culture. The BBC Urdu News Service, by repeatedly broadcasting lies about the Bahri Masjid in the middle of our election campaign, succeeded in subverting our democracy by giving the National Front its decisive edge over the Congress among the Urdu-speaking communities of the north. What direct transmissions could do to our sovereignty and sovereign will is the real national issue for us to confront. It will take at least a decade to build professionalism that will even begin to ready the Doordarshan *jawans* for this invasion. Can we do it by keeping Doordarshan as a government monopoly? Do we not need to experiment in real functional autonomy? How best can we give our professionals in news and current affairs the opportunity of giving creative expression to reporting and commentary? How to reconcile the impera-

## WHO WILL HEAD THE PRASAR BHARATI?



**Khushwant Singh:** for having travelled from Sanjay Gandhi to L.K. Advani?



**Pran Chopra:** for not knowing the difference between a minority and a coalition government?



**Nikhil Chakravarty:** for having converted journalism into an advanced course in sycophancy?



**Arun Shourie:** for not being able to make it to the Rajya Sabha?

tives of the "freedom of expression" and "constructive nation-building?"

Instead of even beginning to consider these real questions, the NF is up to its usual ruse of diverting attention to the establishment of "autonomous" commissions and corporations which it can pack with its India International Centre friends whose intellectual objectivity has, apparently, been subjected to the ultimate shibboleth. Do you hate Rajiv Gandhi? If so, please sign up. If not, autonomy is not for you.

For, after all, who is it they will be putting into governorship of their new corporation, Prasar Bharati? Khushwant Singh—for having travelled all the way from Sanjay Gandhi to L.K. Advani? Pran Chopra—for not knowing the difference between a minority government and a coalition government? Nikhil Chakravarty—for having converted journalism into an advanced course in sycophancy? Arun Shourie—as compensation for the Prime Minister not having the guts to nominate him to the Rajya Sabha in the face of the Tau's dire warning that he would make an Amir Singh out of V.P. Singh if the Prime Minister tried to be an autonomous PM? B.G. Verghese—for having so endeared himself to the electorate that he was the only prominent Indira-baiter to lose an election in 1977? Amita Malik as a kind of Nineties' production of *The Tamung Of The Shrew*? Or God forbid, Vinod Mehta, the ageing and fading sometime-editor, who has taken such umbrage at my mixing him up with the "ageing and fading film star", Vinod Khanna.

All that the Prasar Bharati Bill is going to do is change the nomenclature of Akashvani and Doordarshan (perfectly good names, one would have thought) to Prasar Bharati and give V.P. (which is what all of us so affectionately call him) the opportunity of bestowing patronage on all those who are brim-full of affection for him. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, as the Frogs would say, (The more things change, the more they remain the same).

Actually, Shiv, I have a much better idea. Why stop at taking off V.P. Singh from the small screen? Why not take him off altogether?

With much affection,

Autonomously yours,  
Mami •

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.



# In deep waters

*Marine fish tanks are here to stay*

**M**arine tanks are in. And the ordinary aquarium of yesterday is just another plebian fixture as far as Bombay's select band of aquatic enthusiasts are concerned. Keeping marine fish tanks or salt water tanks—as opposed to the mundane fresh water tanks which grace middle-class drawing rooms—is a fad that the city's rich are taking to in a big way. And in keeping with their tastes, this hobby is exotic, elitist and exorbitantly expensive. A faithful replication of the deep sea environment requires not just skill, but loads of money as well.

Nitesh Patel, the man who introduced this new hobby to India is no newcomer to the marine world. Patel and his wife Rupa, have been in the business of making fresh water fish tanks for homes, offices, and restaurants. Their creations also grace the international and domestic airports in Bombay. They have designed a fisheries project in the Andamans, a sea water aquarium at the Visakhapatnam naval base and an aquarium at the Pragati Maidan for the ocean development department too. Such familiarity with the life aquatic was perfect material for the creation of an innovative idea—and the birth of marine tanks.

Keeping a marine tank at home is no easy business. Most tanks are about four feet long and a foot and a half deep. An initial investment of Rs 15,000 is required for the tank alone, and this is not the end of the matter. Obtaining the exotic marine creatures is where most of the fun lies. Deep sea fish are extremely elusive. As Patel says, "It is not easy to catch marine fish. The diver has to go pretty deep with a torch and maybe he gets just one fish." It is this sense of adventure that motivates the enthusiasts.

With pollution along the Indian coast having killed most marine fish,

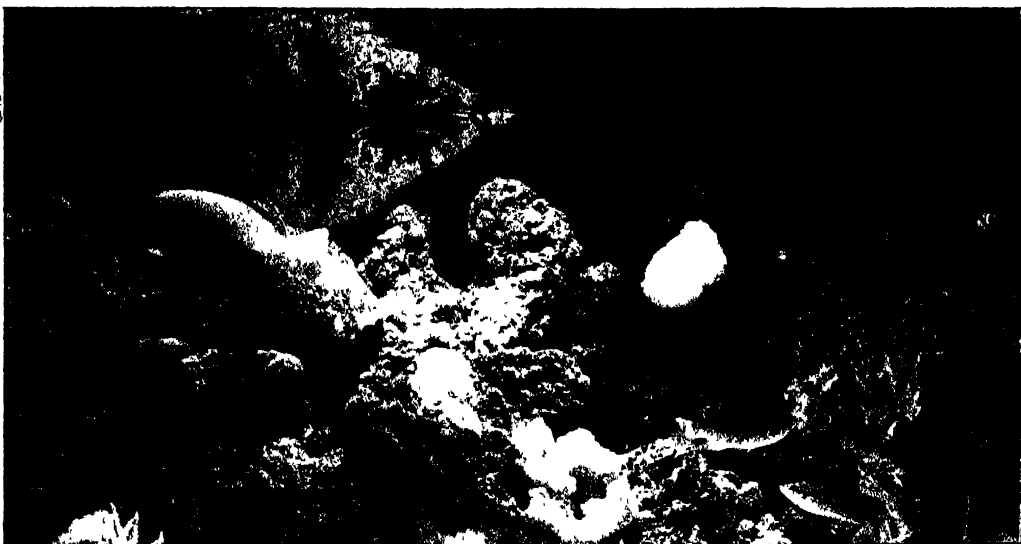
the creatures are usually imported from the Philippines. Some fish, however, are found in coral reefs along the Lakshwadeep and the Andaman islands.

Painstaking care and constant vigilance are necessary ingredients of this fascinating hobby. Filtration of the water is the most important aspect of keeping the tank 'healthy'. The fish need 1,650 litres per hour filtration to clear off noxious gasses and the tiniest grains of dirt, because any impurities in the water can kill the fish.

The tanks also need to be regularly

Nitesh and Rupa Patel, Dr Dilip Virani and Suresh Cordo—all marine fish enthusiasts—it is well worth the trouble. Virani, a well-known surgeon owns a superbly vibrant tank with a colony of sponges, live coral and volcanic rocks from the Andamans. Suresh Cordo, a graphic designer by profession has what one would call an 'adman's' tank. It is very artistic, almost stylised, with its deliberately flattened out rocks. Cordo insists that he wants a serene environment for his fish—an environment where the fish feel at home—even if it's once re-

GAUTAM PATOLE



**A marine tank: the craze is catching on**

checked to ensure that the level of nitrates and nitrites remains stable. The same care has to be taken with the Ph levels. The salinity of water has to be monitored, too. Since the fish and other living organisms use up trace nitrates and nitrites remains stable. sent in the tank, the selective replacement of these becomes absolutely imperative. Once the water is set and matured, though, it becomes stable. Such specialised equipment as test kits, filters, heaters, thermometers and even medicines are required for the upkeep of the marine fish. Since these are not available in India they are imported, mostly from Germany.

This hobby extracts a high price, not only financially, but also in terms of time, energy and commitment. But, to

moved

But what accounts for this fascination with marine fish? Explains Nitesh Patel, with whom it all began, "It gives you a satisfaction that is indescribable. It is out of this world. The colour and shapes of the fish. Colours you don't see naturally, their movements in and out of the sand, sleeping at nights in the coral and coming out at sunrise."

The enthusiasts often meet and discuss their fish because information on this subject is scarce in India. While they admit that the present costs of keeping a marine tank are prohibitive, they hope that the craze will catch on and decrease costs considerably. According to them, it is only a matter of time. •

**Olga Tella/Bombay**



# RAJ AND SWARAJ

*Partap Sharma's serial for Channel Four provides new insights into India's colonial era*

**T**he sahibs have gone but the Raj lives on: in films, documentaries, television series and, of course, history books. But if Partap Sharma, novelist and filmmaker whose claim to fame is his voice-over for countless documentaries, is to be believed, there may be a different side to the largely pro-British story of Indian Independence that has found favour with historians worldwide. And this is the subject of his 13-episode television series titled, *The British Raj Through Indian Eyes*, in the last leg of its post-production work before being telecast on UK's Channel Four. "The Raj period," says Sharma, "has been formative as far as India and Britain are concerned and it would be ostrich-like not to examine it. The trouble with Indians is that because they want to forget it, they would rather not see it (on film). But our strength lies in seeing it and coming to terms with it."

According to Sharma, history, as recorded by British historians, is replete with "myths and clichés about the Raj which have overshadowed the truth". And this is what Sharma "tackles and explodes by examining circumstantial evidence". Small wonder then, that he describes his series as a "thesis" which is not just a study of history but of its methods and the people involved. "It's a three-tiered series which deals with the phobias of the British about the Indians and vice versa," explains the director.

Set in the docu-drama format, *The British Raj* grapples with three pivotal periods of the colonial era: the 1857 Mutiny, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and Indian Independence and the Partition (1942 to 1947). Between these there are numerous inter-linking events, which Sharma has presented with the help of historical data, interviews with historians, evidence that the series' own team of researchers unearthed, discussions with the descendants of historical figures, and in certain instances, dramatisation of events. Throughout the series, however, the director and his team focussed on "primary source research because we were dealing with things that were

pushed in the shadows, as myths had taken over the truth".

**M**ost historians have fostered the myth that the British "came to trade and stayed to rule", and that only after Clive won the Battle of Plassey in 1757 did they attempt territorial control. But Sharma believed that there was enough circumstantial evidence to doubt this theory, "and like a detective among the dead", he started "looking around for evidence."

He found it in the court records of Emperor James II, which contained details about a "forgotten war" which was declared for "Hindustan" much before the Battle of Plassey. "This evidence," says Sharma, "shattered yet another myth—that the British were responsible for instilling a sense of national unity among Indians who were just diverse caste groups fighting among themselves." If that was the case, argues the director, the records would never have referred to the Indian nation as "Hindustan".

The series abounds in such insights



**Partap Sharma**



"The series will raise controversies. It's not intended to raise hackles but generate interest in our past."





## ***The British Raj Through Indian Eyes***

Shatters the myth that the British were responsible for instilling a sense of national unity among the Indians.

like a say in the editorial content of the series. Moreover, Sharma discloses, "He was scared that the project would turn out to be a 'controversial' one. Ultimately it was a consortium of smaller groups, including the Sterling Group, which raised the money to buy out the Canadian's share and get the project going."

Sharma is confident about one thing: that *The British Raj* will attract attention. "Of course, the series will raise controversies," he asserts. "If it didn't, it would be like another history lesson. But the question is what kind of controversies it will raise. It's not intended to raise hackles but generate interest in our past and provoke debates." It has, in fact, been suggested that Channel Four initiate a group discussion after each episode.

Nobody was short on gratuitous advice for director Sharma, either. Channel Four, for instance, proposed to send over a team of editors to help the filmmaker sift through the 1,600 hours of film material that he needed to edit into 13 compact episodes (52-minutes each). Sharma's reply was swift and scathing. "The next time your wife has a baby," he suggested, "I'll send a butcher to chop it up." The Channel Four team kept well away after that, and Sharma hopes to complete editing by September.

Also in the works is a book based on the series, which will provide "primary source material" to many history students. In fact, Dr Judith Browne, chairperson of the Oxford University's history department has already requested access to the "new, original and primary source research on which the series is based". As Sharma says, with justifiable pride: "India won independence. But with this series it will win dignity for its points of view." ●

**Aditya Chatterjee/Bombay**

***The British Raj* will attract attention. It's a three-tiered series which deals with the phobias of the British about the Indians and vice versa**

into Indian history, all backed up by "authentic research." You have one of Bhagat Singh's associates, who had been sent to the Andamans as punishment for his involvement in the conspiracy against the British, recounting details of the action plan and the exact manner in which it was executed. Also featured is an Indian revolutionary who killed six Englishmen but managed to escape. The relatives and acquaintances of the folk heroes of the freedom movement give their side of what has remained—for the most part—a British tale of Indian Independence.

The amount of research required and the painstaking accumulation of facts meant that the series was seven years in the making. "All our findings have been cross-checked five times with police and hospital records, and quotes from living witnesses wherever possible," says Sharma.

It was, in fact, only in December 1989, after five years of continuous research by a team of 57 consultants and 40 researchers, that shooting commenced. Filmed in India and England,

the series is co-produced by Sharma's Indofocus Films, Channel Four and the Sterling Group of Publications at a cost of Rs 60.5 lakhs. Doordarshan, is apparently, interested in telecasting the series. But, unfortunately, *The British Raj*, is yet to find a sponsor.

The funds for the sustained research work required for the serial, weren't easy to come by. "Channel Four agreed to put in 50 per cent if I could raise the rest," recalls Sharma. He approached a number of industrialists for contributions but almost all of them wanted to know the "financial value of investing in a series like this", and followed this up with a blank refusal. Finally, the Canadian proprietor of an Indian company agreed to shell out the money. But the deal was called off when the financier decided he'd



# NOTE-WORTHY

*Ilaiyaraaja is the best the south Indian movie scene has to offer*

**H**e made his debut in Tamil movies in 1976, composing the score for *Annakili*. And a mere 14 years later, music director Ilaiyaraaja (45) had completed work on his 500th film, *Anjali*. The achievement would be impressive enough in terms of sheer productivity, even if the quality of Raaja's work was a little suspect. But no, his music compositions are easily the best that south Indian cinema has to offer. Testifies violin virtuoso L. Subramaniam, "He is as good a composer as any top-ranking one anywhere in the world."

As Ilaiyaraaja begins work on his 501st film, *Jagadeka Veerudu, Athiloka Sundari* (Telugu), in his small recording theatre in Prasad Studio, Kodambakkam, it is easy to see why he is so prolific. While other composers play and replay a reel a number of times before they come up with the background score—this, often with the help of the many assistants gathered around—Raaja works differently. The scene is projected on the screen and the director immediately knocks off the complete score. A dozen instrumentalists stand silently behind the director as he works on his score-pad, and copy down their individual parts. Raaja does not demonstrate any musical movement on his harmonium; the score is put down in western notations for the benefit of the musicians.

Composing a song takes only 20 minutes or so, with Ilaiyaraaja noting down the orchestration to the minutest detail, without missing a

single obbligato. The minor innovations in the course of song recording are done with the minimum of fuss. "It is as if there is a computer working inside him," says long-time associate T. Sundararajan. Agrees G. K. Venkatesh, now assisting Raaja with the background score for *Jagadeka Veerudu, Athiloka Sundari*, "He can finish an entire movie in less than three days, while the others take two or three months, or even more. Once he completed two films simultaneously in just five days."

Unlike most other music directors, Raaja pays as much attention to the background score as he does to his song compositions. "The orchestration is like a foreign film. That is why we are all coming from Bombay to work with Ilaiyaraaja," says Shyam Raj, a saxophone player in the director's music group. "He just looks at the screen and it comes out tak, tak, tak. It's as if he has already decided the entire score and seen the film a hundred times. It is incredible."

Film producer D.V.S. Raju testifies to the distinctive quality of Raaja's work: "You can close your eyes and sit in the theatre, but it will not take you more than a couple of minutes to know that the film's music has been scored by Ilaiyaraaja. There is a big distance between him and the others in the field. He is clearly the number one here." Eminent Hindi film music director Naushad admits, "Raaja has achieved a hundred times more than anyone else in Indian film music."

Small wonder then, that Ilaiyaraaja—also called *Isaignani* (Musical saint) and *Isaichakravarthi* (Emperor of music)—is as much of a star in the south as celluloid heroes Rajnikant and Kamalahasan. A sure-fire way to sell a film is to get the three-time National Award winner to compose the music and then splash his pictures on the publicity posters. Ilaiyaraaja extracts his price, asking for, and getting, astronomical sums for every film. His friends, however, maintain that he demands only such



**The ability to integrate is Ilaiyaraaja's greatest strength. He borrows from Bach, from Beethoven and even from the simplest village tunes**



sums as individual film-makers can afford.

**B**eing south India's highest-paid music director can't erase all memories of early insecurities, but in Ilaiyaraaja's case it certainly helps. The composer, however, is very cagey about his childhood years, filled with poverty and hunger as they were. Raaja's father, Ramasamy, was a supervisor in an estate and the owner of a tiny piece of land in a hilly hamlet. Since he was a Harijan, he stayed on the outskirts of the village with his four wives and ten children. In time, he converted to Christianity, calling himself Daniel Ramasamy.

Raaja, second among the three sons of Ramasamy's fourth wife Chinathayi, was still at school when his father died. His mother began doing odd jobs on the estate to keep starvation at bay, and Raaja had to quit studying—he was in the eighth class—to join his stepbrother Varadarajan's music troupe, which gave programmes on behalf of the communist party.

He began with singing the female parts, graduating to playing the harmonium. With elder brother Bhaskar on the tabla and the younger Amar performing on a number of instruments, the "Paavaalar brothers" soon became a crowd-puller in rural Tamil Nadu. Around this time, they met a cholera inspector, Bharatiraja, who spent his time mimicking Sivaji Ganesan and M.G. Ramachandran at the wayside tea-stalls, when not dreaming of a film career. When Bharatiraja took the train to Kodambakkam the Paavaalar brothers followed.

The break was a long time in coming. In the meantime, the brothers performed on Madras beach, quite literally singing for their supper. Ilaiyaraaja was a cut above his siblings, but with little formal education and no training in music, there was little hope of his getting a look into the south Indian movie scene.

However, contrary to the conventional wisdom on the subject, Raaja did manage an entry and clung on with his fingernails. His friend S.P. Balasubramaniam (now one of the fore-



**Ilaiyaraaja is as much of a hero in the south as Rajnikant and Kamalahasan. A sure-fire way to sell a film is to splash his pictures on the posters**

most playback singers in the state) had a music troupe, and Raaja applied for a job, clutching his ancient harmonium close to his heart. Balu informed the young man from Pannaipuram village that there was no job for a harmonium player. That's okay, said Raaja, I can play the guitar as well. The job was his.

Ilaiyaraaja's first Tamil film, *Annakili*, came in 1976, at a time when most composers were churning out eminently forgettable and trite tunes by the dozen. Raaja's compositions—which drew heavily on folk music—were a welcome change and soon became the rage. One film followed another and soon Ilaiyaraaja was the music sensation of the south.

The partnership with Balasubramaniam proved particularly fruitful, with the duo churning out countless hits and becoming good friends in the process. When Balu lost his voice and had to go to America for treatment, the director waited nearly six months for him to come back. And when Balu returned, the first song he sang was for *Anjali*, under the maestro's direction.

**R**aaja, however, underplays his genius. "I am an ordinary man. In fact, I am just a fool and I know very little music," he

says. "If only I knew enough music I would not be sitting here."

Kodambakkam and the obvious *filmi* stuff can be limiting, but Raaja does experiment with western pop, western classical and Indian music, both folk and classical, in an attempt to break out of the strait-jacket the industry has willy-nilly thrust him into. He scored the music for the Hollywood starrer, *Bloodstone*, in which Rajnikant played a bit role. His sessions with western music instructor Dhanaraj opened up an entirely new world for Raaja: one that was peopled by Mozart, Bach and Beethoven.

Soon after, Ilaiyaraaja tried his hand at fusion music and came out with two albums, *How To Name It?* and *Nothing But Wind*. The latter includes the number *I love you Mozart* which Raaja begins with a violin prelude reminiscent of Mozart's *Fortieth Symphony*. In the second movement, flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia introduces raga Kalyani, without damaging the intrinsic western ambience of the composition. While Mozart is a favourite, he comes a poor second to Bach. Agrees Professor Sheryar Ookerjee, a Bombay-based musicologist: "Bach's influence is deep and all-pervasive in his music. His conspicuous quality is his ability to so integrate the Indian and western idioms that the seams can hardly be noticed."

The ability to integrate is also Ilaiyaraaja's greatest strength. He borrows from Bach, from Beethoven, from the simplest village tunes; he uses his ancient harmonium with telling effect, and then turns around to work on the most sophisticated musical gadgets with equal facility. In all this, he retains his innate modesty. "I am only a small speck of dust in the vast universe where everything, the sun, the earth and the planets are already programmed." ●

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**







# CLIPPED WINGS

*Bird care at New Delhi's charity hospital*

**I**t numbers among the Jain faith's most touching tributes to Nature—a shelter for sick and wounded birds that thrives on generous donations from the devout. But the Charity Bird Hospital, situated near the Red Fort, New Delhi, itself suffers from a familiar human malady: neglect.

"Our main problem is the total lack of enthusiasm," complains Dr I.S. Kothari, the hospital's only veterinarian who has been working there for the last four years. The management, he maintains, shows little interest in

improving the facilities available at the hospital. "I work here as a volunteer," the doctor says, but he receives a salary of Rs 2,100 a month, anyway. None of his assistants—a compounder and two others—get more than Rs 500 a month, even though they work all day. Both Jains and non-Jains may donate lavish sums towards the hospital but most of the money is spent on the temple instead.

The Charity Bird Hospital, which occupies two floors of a garish structure behind the red-brick Digambar Jain temple facing the historic Red

Fort, is said to be the only one of its kind in India. It is different from a zoo or a bird sanctuary in that it is dedicated to the cure and care of wounded birds, who would otherwise be left to die and rot on streets, playfields, house-tops and garbage dumps. Instead, they are rescued and brought to the hospital to be revived and looked after.

The bird hospital, situated in the walled city, is not easily accessible. To reach it, one has to dodge crowds at the busy Chandni Chowk crossing, enter the crowded premises of the Jain



**Birds being attended to at the charity hospital: 'live and let live'; (inset) nursing one of the injured: at no cost, either**



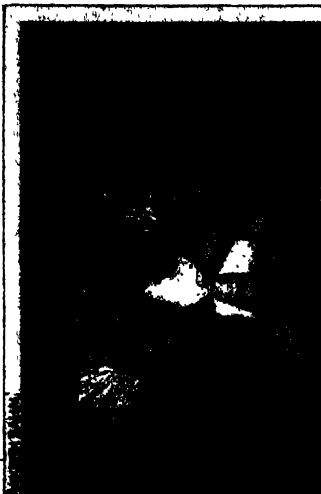
maimed by pellets, fan blades and kite-strings. In agony they wait for the healing touch, when the doctor and his assistants will get to work on them, with scissors, scalpel, ointment and cotton wool.

"The important thing is to stop the bleeding," says Dr Kothari, for a bird has very little blood. Once it is wounded and the bleeding starts, it has little chance of survival unless the wound is carefully washed and bandaged. He adds, "If the bleeding is profuse, we usually put tincture or tincture benzoin on the wound, otherwise antiseptic ointment is enough."

The birds have other complaints as well. They suffer from respiratory trouble, viral infection, white diarrhoea or vomiting, infectious bronchitis and abscesses. The treatment for these usually consists of a course in antibiotics, and then, multi-vitamins. These are dissolved in the birds' drinking water before being administered. A more serious case would need an injection. A sick bird could take any

temple, walk around to its rear, and climb two flights of steep and narrow steps to the second floor of building decorated with garish graffiti: "Photography strictly forbidden", "Free bowls for feeding birds". In the second-floor office sit two bored attendants, visibly tired of entertaining journalists and camera crews.

The hospital is a noisy place, with the traffic on the crossing outside contributing to the din. The smell of dissolved antibiotics and vitamins fills the air and the birds cry out piteously for attention all day. There are peahens and partridges, love birds and colourful fowl, sparrows, parakeets and pigeons—most of them hit or



**The birds wait for the healing touch, when the doctors will get to work with scissors, scalpel, ointment and cotton wool**

thing from three days to a month to get well.

The hospital boasts of an 8,000-strong winged population. Of these, as many as 2,000 are being treated for wounds and illnesses on the second floor, and the rest are recuperating in the shelter above, where they stay till they are strong enough to fly away. The hospital's annual report claims that the birds are freed when fully cured but the doctor admits, "We release very few of them." He allows, however, that this may be unfair to the birds. One reason for the continued captivity could be a fear that a weak or handicapped bird might be devoured by carnivores.

The Charity Bird Hospital even has a facility for treating "outdoor patients". Anybody can bring his bird over to be treated, completely free of charge. For, as Dr Kothari admits, "The donations more than make up for it." The hospital may well admit a visiting patient if necessary, but only if it is "vegetarian"—that is, if it doesn't feed on animal flesh (this, apparently, excludes worms). The restriction on admitting meat-eaters is for religious reasons. But then, hawks and hunting birds are rare visitors to the hospital, anyway.

Founded 60 years ago by the late Acharya Shanti Sagar Maharaj, the bird hospital functions on the basis of two tenets of Jain philosophy—"Live and let live" and "Have mercy on all living beings." In 1988-89, the hospital treated 24,026 birds of which 2,026 were outdoor patients, most of whom were pets. The birds in the sick wards are homeless creatures, which, if left to their fate, would have died.

Donations in 1989-90 amounted to a staggering Rs 1,21,000. Dr Kothari claims that only Rs 27,000 of this was ploughed back into the hospital. The hospital, however, never has a problem of funds, though it is in dire need of a laboratory and equipment. Says the doctor: "We get more medicines and grain for the birds than is really necessary." The medicines come free from bird-lovers all over the country and the grain comes in 100-kg gunny bags. About 40 per cent of it is donated by devout Jains and the rest by people outside the community. Kothari laments: "Yet, when it comes to improving facilities at the hospital—I have been pressing for better pay scales, a laboratory and operating equipment—the managers become tight-fisted." •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**





**T**hough Rekha and Mukesh Aggarwal come from entirely different backgrounds, the actress is at pains to convince everyone that they are getting along splendidly. After all, it is not a person's colour, accent or language that matters, she says. She takes pride in the fact that he is a self-made man. And she is happy that he is as simple as her, which is really not saying anything at all.

After several tumultuous affairs that led to nowhere, Rekha now sounds genuinely happy. Happy enough to declare that she finds the roses redder, the grass greener and the sunsets more enchanting than ever before.

**J**eetendra is one star who is very reluctant to feature in any video magazine

**Rekha: deliriously happy**

Yes, he thinks that his fans will be interested in watching him struggle to get his takes right and see him laboriously redoing his make-up. But he is con-

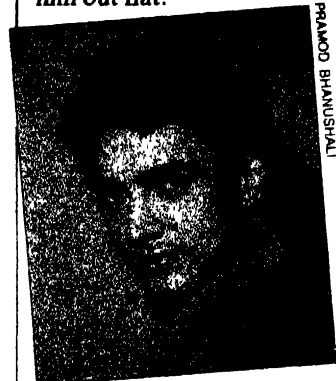
vinced that this would kill all the glamour associated with his profession. Clearly, the fading star, who has always made out that he is free from hang-ups, is as concerned about his image as anyone else.

**A**nil Kapoor and Sunjay Dutt have a lot to prove to each other. It seems that the puny Kapoor has always had a silent grudge for not being built along the lines of the macho Dutt. So, out to prove that he could give the Dutt a run for his money, he insisted on doing some stunts on the sets of *Hamla* all by himself. And earned himself a fractured leg, cancelled shooting and his producers' ire.

The only person pleased with this sorry episode was Madhuri Dixit, who earned an unexpected holiday with her most regular co-star having gone out of circuit, temporarily.

**I**n the old days, Hindi film heroes were really tough men. Not any more though. During the shooting of Dev Anand's *Awwal Number*, Aamir Khan and Ekta were required to execute a passionate embrace while rolling over rocks. The shot

was interrupted by a piercing cry from Aamir, who had gone blue in the face. Concerned unit hands rushed to their hero's help and enquired what was wrong. Only to hear Aamir sheepishly admit that taking the pleasantly plump Ekta's weight had knocked him out flat.



**Aamir Khan: not a tough guy**

**G**etting thrown out of a women's loo is not much fun. Ask Chunky Pandey who, on a recent trip to Switzerland, walked into a ladies' loo by mistake. Only to walk out minutes later with a black eye and a dislocated jaw. Obviously, the *frauleins* there believe in punches and not in scurrying for cover when they discover a male in their domain. As Chunky found out the hard way. ●

**Jeetendra: low on self-esteem**





# A house of cards

*Another multi-storeyed building in Calcutta comes tumbling down*



WEST BENGAL

In the darkness came the first sounds of tragedy. After the first deep rumble came the crash as a multi-storeyed building was torn off its foundations. The earth trembled, as pieces of shattered masonry crashed to the ground. The people of Buroshib-tola, in Behala, a suburb of south Calcutta, feared that an earthquake was ripping through the night of 14 May. But for the second time in less than a year, a multi-storeyed building nearing completion had collapsed, crushing people to death.

Trapped in the mound of rubble were 20 young men, residents of the adjoining Goborjhuri bostee. "There is no room in our homes. So we slept in the unfinished buildings," a survivor later admitted. As their screams pierced through the steamy night, local residents picked through the rubble in a frantic attempt to prise out the survivors. Spotting an arm, the rescue workers clawed at the concrete blocks around it. But they could not save Swapn Ghosh, a 17-year-old resident of the slum. When they lifted his inert body covered with cement dust, he was already dead. Three

others—Sanjay Das, Sagar Haldar, and Bechu Haldar, pinned down by concrete slabs, died slowly and painfully, even as firemen and local rescue workers scrambled in the dim glow of flashlights to lift the concrete blocks. Anwar Ali, another teenaged boy, probably buried under the piles of

broken bricks, is still missing.

In the early soft light of dawn, residents and rescue workers had their first look at the 20 ft tall pile of shattered masonry. What had been a five-storeyed building, one of the 14 inside the Bangur complex, a housing project for middle-income families, was in ruins. The building's roof, a slate-grey concrete oblong remained perched at an eerie angle on the heap. Fortunately, the building had not toppled over, but sagged on its foundations.

Residents of the nearby slum had

and stones," says Sashti Haldar. "I am not sure how I survived, except that I did." Another survivor, pinned down by the rubble, had one hand free. Till he was rescued, he shouted and threw stones to help rescue workers find him.

The building collapse came even before the residents of Buroshib-tola had recovered from another crippling tragedy almost one and a half years ago. Over 500 residents were partly paralysed after eating meals cooked in adulterated edible oil. Bechu Haldar, pulverised by a falling concrete block,



The collapsed building: another scandal

gone without sleep the previous night, now the crowd, shocked but angry, seemed even larger. And in halting tones, distraught survivors spoke of the horrors of the previous night. "I was walking up the stairs looking for a place to sleep. Then the stairs seemed to give way. I was pelted by bricks

was one of the victims. Not very far away, about 50 people are still recovering from the effects of slow arsenic poisoning, after effluents from a chemical factory seeped into the water table.

Hours after the tragedy, the state's politicians began their unseemly game





**The Bangurs being taken to court: penalised**

of finger pointing. The complex, comprising 14 buildings was built on a 12-bigha plot, a reclaimed marshland. The basic design of the buildings was flawed and a part of it was illegally constructed, admitted mayor-in-council (housing), Nirmal Mukherjee. Since Behala was a part of the South Suburban Municipality till 1985 (the plans were sanctioned in 1983) the mayor, Kamal Basu, exonerated himself of any responsibility. "The Calcutta Corporation would never have sanctioned such a plan, but we will stop construction of houses in marshy areas or on filled-up ponds," he declared. He added that very often unscrupulous promoters paid off his officials in the assessment department to "show marshy land as high ground."

If Kamal Basu is quick to pass the buck, so is Niranjan Mukherjee, the former chairman of the South Suburban Municipality, who actually sanctioned the plan. Shrugging off the responsibility, Mukherjee says that the houses were not built according to plan. He gave permission for four houses inside the complex, not 14, the municipality had sanctioned five-storeyed houses, not six-storeyed ones, says Mukherjee, now a CPI(M) MLA.

Through deft manoeuvring, the CPI(M) has tried to pin the blame on Suren Dasgupta, the local Congress(I) councillor. When the Calcutta Corporation detected that the construction company was deviating from the sanctioned plans, it posted sentries outside the complex to ensure that further construction work did not con-

tinue. CPI(M) leaders allege that Dasgupta intervened and ensured that the sentries were taken off. But Dasgupta stoutly denies any involvement. "No one will believe that the Calcutta Corporation will do such a thing at a Congress(I) councillor's request," he says.

Eleven months ago, when another multi-storeyed building toppled over, crushing 11 persons, the promoter Pradeep Kundalia, had played

Choudhury blamed "structural failure, inadequate foundation and use of substandard materials" for the collapse. While the Bangurs are behind bars, Pradeep Kundalia remains a free man. Though a three-member committee has indicted him for using inferior building materials, Kundalia is producing a feature film and the commissioner of police, B K Saha is helping him out. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**

## Minting money

*A counterfeiting racket is busted in Raipur*

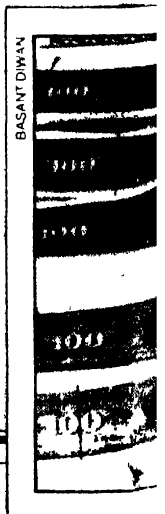
**T**he next time you lay your hand on a hundred-rupee note, look at it carefully. It might well be a fake. For five years, a gang of forgers in Raipur had been printing counterfeit currency notes of that denomination which were good enough to fool even seasoned bankers.

On 1 May, the employees of the All India Radio (AIR), Raipur, detected some fake hundred-rupee notes in their pay packets, which they received from the local branch of the State Bank of India (SBI). The police was immediately informed and the countdown began to the busting of one of the most sensational rackets in this district town of Madhya Pradesh.

The police, for a change, acted with astonishing efficiency and tracked down the culprits within a

short span of three days. They swooped down on the gang, arrested seven people, seized sophisticated printing equipment and material, along with fake currency notes worth Rs three lakhs. The police also confiscated a country-made pistol, seven live cartridges, an Ambassador car and genuine currency notes worth Rs 24,000. According to the police, the gang had been operating for about five years, and it is feared that they may have dumped about Rs one crore worth of fake notes in the market.

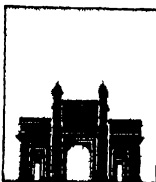
The mini 'mint' was discovered, of all places, in the premises of Salem school, which is run by





# Irrigation imbroglio

*A group of experts takes the government to task for failed projects*



MAHARASHTRA

There is a row over irrigation in Maharashtra. Bureaucrats in Mantralaya have stalled the presentation of a report by a study group of the State Planning Board on a strategy to overhaul the state's irrigation policy. Prof. H. M. Desarda, member of the board, who headed the study group on agriculture and irrigation said, "The engineers with the bureaucrats of the irrigation department have taken the attitude that we cannot formulate a report because the views expressed were very divergent."

A showdown is imminent between the irrigation department bureaucrats and engineers and Prof. Desarda, who is scheduled to leave on a tour of 20 districts to create public opinion against the 'vested interests' who

are spending crores of rupees on irrigation projects which do not benefit the people. Prof. Desarda told SUNDAY, "We hope to win friends for our reoriented programmes which would cover soil conservation, vegetal cover and land use capability. In short, this 'irrigationism' should be done away with, and people should force the government to take a much wider view of water resource development."

Prof. Desarda's move is likely to pose a challenge to chief minister Sharad Pawar as well, for he has been talking of giving a new thrust to drinking water

and irrigation projects, but has yet not been able to formulate concrete policies and has failed to fight the stranglehold of the engineers and contractors over the state's allocation for irrigation programmes. According to Prof. Desarda, watershed development, rather than irriga-

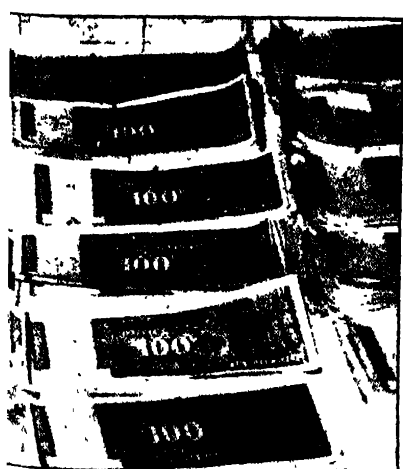


Prof. Desarda: giving new ideas

Christian missionaries, in Katora Talab area of the town. The kingpins of the racket were found to be Raghu Raj Singh and his younger brother, Rajendra Singh, sons of the late Budh Singh, who was a respected citizen and had been associated with the missionaries.

The investigations revealed that a clerk in the government treasury department and a cashier of the main branch of the SBI were also

**Fake currency notes: a timely haul**



involved in the racket. The Director General of Police (DIG), R. K. Diwarkar, and the superintendent of police, Nandan Dube, who conducted the operations against the gang, told SUNDAY that it was one of the biggest currency note rackets in India.

Rajendra Singh, who has been remanded to judicial custody, claimed that he had achieved near perfection in printing fake notes and his unit had the capacity of producing about 1,000 hundred-rupee notes per day. He confessed that he also printed US dollars and Nepalese currency.

While the Singh brothers were quietly getting rich, an intra-group rivalry resulted in their downfall. Squabbles over the sharing of profits between the members of the gang resulted in the leakage of information to the police, and the forgers were nabbed before they could wind up their operations. Money, after all, could not buy them luck—not this time. •

M. V. Khor/Rajpur

tion projects, holds the key to the improvement of rainfed farming. The study group has, therefore, strongly pleaded for completing the watershed development on 10 million hectares in the next decade, which means that the department's workload will increase six-fold per year. But, the study group feels, that there is no alternative means of saving Maharashtra from recurring droughts.

An angry Prof. Desarda has alleged that "on account of the obstinacy and the rigid posture of the irrigation department", the work of the study group could not progress smoothly. He has accused the officers of the department of furnishing inflated figures for covering up their lapses. For instance, Desarda has alleged that though the irrigation department had claimed that the potential had been created for irrigating 25 lakh hectares at the cost of Rs 4,000 crores, no more than one-lakh hectares have been actually irrigated in the last 10 years. The study group also claims that not only is there a shortfall in the capacity utilisation, but the figures of irrigation potential created is also grossly inflated.



Calling for a rejection of the present concept of big projects, Prof. Desarda says, "A review of the number of projects has shown that the sequence, scale and size of impounding water has been topsy turvy." He cites the example of the Girna project and says that the reservoir has never been filled to capacity in the last 15 years. Another example of a failed scheme referred to by Prof. Desarda is the Rs 500-crore Jayakwadi project, the first phase of which was completed 10 years ago. According to him, the project has submerged more land than it has irrigated.

Prof. Desarda feels that the state's irrigation department works in league with politicians and contractors to sell the idea of gigantic projects involving huge financial investments. This, he feels, is a convenient way by which the interested parties make huge profits at the expense of common good. Usually in such projects, the costs escalate ten to 15 times and the time-frame stretches by almost a similar number of years. And to rationalise their mismanagement, the irrigation department peddles the theory that it usually takes a decade and a half to complete a project and nearly another decade to utilise the potential created.

The Central Water Commission and the Planning Commission had, several years ago, suggested the pruning or the suspension of a number of projects that spilled over successive Plan periods. But Maharashtra is reluctant to do so. There are some 13,000 engineers, not to mention the contractors and their political godfathers, who have to be placated by keeping the projects going.

The study group has argued that if the government reoriented its irrigation policies, an additional Rs 1,500 crores would be available for watershed works which, at the rate of Rs 2,000 per hectare, would suffice to treat 15,000 watersheds of 1,000 hectares each. Even if 10 per cent of the area is assured of irrigation facilities under this system, 15 lakh hectares would be benefited, compared to only two to three lakhs hectares by big projects. The watersheds will also be more evenly distributed over 300 blocks in Maharashtra, including the remote upper reaches. Moreover, such watershed development would also help conserve soil moisture, which is the crying need of agriculture in Maharashtra today, says Desarda. •

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**

## Shot down

*Officials force Biju Patnaik to modify his stand on police firing*



ORISSA

The state's home department finally picked up enough courage to say 'no' to chief minister (CM) Biju Patnaik. The CM had issued an order to the effect that the police could not open fire on unruly and violent mobs without getting the prior permission of the government. But the inevitable has happened: the chief minister has had to backtrack in the face of stiff opposition from the police and the home department.

Patnaik called a meeting of the home secretary, Sahadev Sahoo, and the director general of police, S N Sinha, and wanted to know why his decision, announced more than a month ago, had not been communicated to the police department. What incensed the chief minister was that a villager was killed and two others were injured in a police firing in the Sarankul area of Nayagarh subdivision after Patnaik had made the announcement.

The officials tried to explain the impracticality of the decision by saying that the implementation of the order required an amendment to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which is a central law. What the officials tried to tell Patnaik was that it might not always be practical on the part of the police to withhold their action against an unruly, violent mob till they got in touch with Bhubaneswar and obtained the government's permission to open fire.

Patnaik finally realised the problem posed by his order and agreed to a face-saving formula. The home department would now issue an instruction to the police to the effect that the local police authorities would have to inform the government before rushing a force to a troubled spot where firing may become necessary. But intimating Bhubaneswar has not been made mandatory. While dealing with a student's

mob, however, the police must inform Bhubaneswar before taking action.

Patnaik had issued the order in a huff after he learnt that a few students of Rajendra College in Bolangir had been injured in police firing in March. The students had hijacked some private buses and attacked their staff because a bus conductor had allegedly refused to issue a ticket to a student at the stipulated concessional rate.

Few people doubt Patnaik's good intentions, especially in view of the fact that the police, in many cases, do commit excesses in meeting law and order problems. But his decision shocked not only the police but politicians and bureaucrats also because of its unrealistic nature. At Narendrapur village, in Sarankul area, policemen were subjected to jeers and jibes

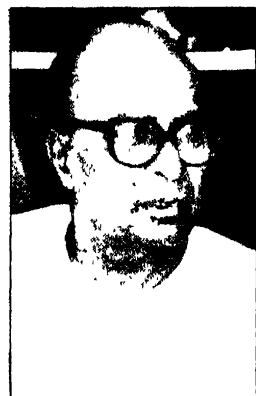
by an unruly mob, as the people took it for granted that the cops, though fully armed, would not open fire in view of the chief minister's order. Many policemen, including the officer-in-charge of the Sarankul police station, were attacked and they suffered injuries. When the situation seemed to get out of control, the police ignored the chief minister's directive and opened fire. After all, the unruly caste-Hindu villagers had gone on a

rampage after having driven away the Harijans from the villages.

In earlier incidents of violence, the police were too demoralised to take action against the trouble-makers. The most significant incident took place near Sambalpur when the police refused to come to the help of some truck drivers when they were attacked by dacoits. The police particularly declined to move to the spot when they were informed that the dacoits possessed firearms.

Now that Patnaik has agreed to modify his order, policemen in the state have heaved a sigh of relief, and so have most people. •

**Sarada P. Nanda/Bhubaneswar**



**Biju Patnaik: face-saving formula**



# Coming home

*India liberalises visa regulations for NRIs*

**F**or British nationals of Indian origin, the Indian high commission in London has recently brought good news. A new package of visa laws has lifted certain regulations which were making travelling to India a veritable nightmare.

Early this month, the Indian high commission announced a unilateral decision to introduce five-year multi-entry visas for all foreigners of Indian origin, worldwide. Since visa rules had become very stringent after Operation Bluestar, the new step came as a relief for all those who hold British passports.

Behind the move was Kuldip Nayar, India's new high commissioner to Britain, who had expressed the hope that a day would finally arrive when visa restrictions between Britain and India were abolished altogether. "We are taking this step on the five-year visa unilaterally," said Nayar, adding, "We hope the British government will reciprocate." Nayar was "very optimistic" about the fact that the government will be able to do away with visas for short periods of up to three or four weeks. A move to abolish visas for those visiting Britain for a month is under study, and is likely to become a reality by mid-year.

At present, the five-year multi-entry visa applies to those who want to stay in India continuously for five years and those who want to visit the country for relatively brief stays over a period of five years. While the former would include all those who wished to settle permanently, study, or set up business in India, the latter would include people who wanted to make short trips to India to visit relatives or for a holiday. People travelling under the second category, however, would not be able to stay in India for more than six months at a time to exempt them from police registration. Visitors

to India are currently required to register with the police after four months.

A three-member home ministry team visiting Britain to study the case for visa relaxation is also considering opening the five-year multi-entry visa to foreign nationals. Simultaneously, the government's black list of people requiring security clearance before getting a visa permit is also likely to be reduced. At present, the list has some 289 people. This is likely to be reduced to less than 100 as the names of those who are no longer considered a security threat will be struck off.

"The step is a very welcome one,"

Nayar has also added some more recommendations to the proposal. These include

- Charges for both short-term and long-term visas should be reduced.
- People aged 65 years and above should be exempt altogether from visa fees to visit India.
- The rule requiring Indian missions to refer to New Delhi all visa applications of people belonging to the north-east should be scrapped, and the authority transferred to London.

Nayar has also suggested that the short-term visa fees be reduced from the present £23 to £15 and the long-

term visa fees from £69 to £30.

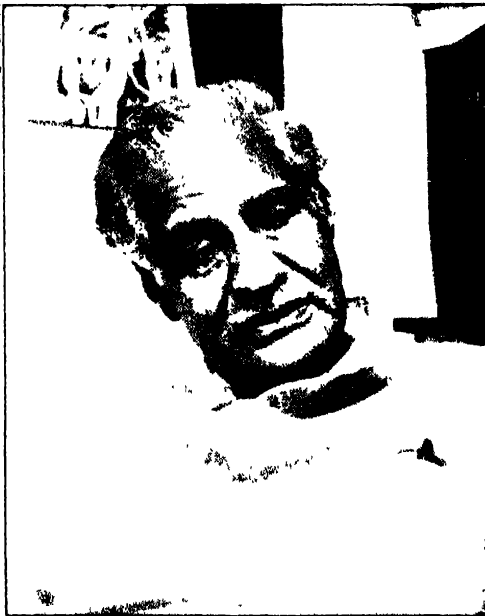
"We would like to make it less of a bother and expense for those of Indian origin who want to visit their relatives and go on their holidays to India," he said. However, till the move was accepted, the current rates would remain in force.

The move will have to be referred to the finance ministry as it has been a steady foreign exchange earner for India. Last year the Indian high commission earned £2 million by issuing 1,32,000 visas. The government is also con-

sidering raising the period of tourist and other short-term visas from 120 to 180 days. In exceptional cases, a person may be granted a 72-hour visa at the airport of entry itself, say home ministry officials. However, this would be applicable only in cases of emergency, like death in the family.

While the Indian high commission is thrashing out visa problems, proposals like a visa counter in Southall are being given serious thought. Nayar is determined to smoothen out the restrictions on travelling and is hopeful that the British government will respond. So far, the British have remained characteristically tight-lipped.

**Shrabani Basu/London**



**Kuldip Nayar expresses the hope that a day will arrive when visa restrictions between India and Britain will be abolished altogether**

says H. S. Rooprah of the Indian Workers' Association, a prominent Indian organisation in Southall, home to a majority of Sikhs in London. He adds, "But we will be waiting for the day when visa restrictions are lifted altogether."

The removal of short-term visas will be welcomed by those Indian families settled abroad who usually visit India for a month on their annual leave paying £23 for a single-entry visa. The five-year visa will presently cover people of Indian origin only and their spouses and children, but will not be available to foreigners who have been nationals of Sri Lanka, Pakistan or Bangladesh.





# THE WORLD OUTSIDE

*Inside the mind of the imprisoned  
Nelson Mandela*

**W**innie, above all, is Nelson's constant companion in his cell and his contact with the outer world. Throughout these long years of separation, the separated have grown closer. There is no dimming in the relationship which has withstood malicious gossip and every kind of State persecution. He addresses her filially, as is customary among Thembu and Pondo, as Mum (the mother of his children), as Dadewethu (sister), Nomabandla (the name his Mandela clan

gave her) as sister, as Zanyiwe and Ngutyana (reference to her tribe). The love-making has continued at a distance, and always in the presence of strangers; the love talk contains its privacy in signs and gestures.

Throughout the years, Winnie has made every visit an event for him to remember and relish, presenting herself with meticulous care, in toiletry, jewellery, and in the dress or kaftan chosen for the occasion.

And each visit is celebrated in the letter that follows.

You looked really wonderful on 17/11, very much like the woman I married. There was colour in your face. Gone was the choleric appearance and glazed look in your eyes when you are under pressure of over-dieting. As usual I kept addressing you as Mum but my body kept telling me that a woman is sitting across this platform. I felt like singing, even if just to say Hallelujah!

22 November, 1979

You looked really sparkingly attractive in your outfit during your last visit, especially on Sunday. There was hardly any evidence that Zemi and Zindzi sucked away your youth and part of your physical beauty.

31 March, 1983

Your visit last month was quite unexpected and that may be one reason why I enjoyed it so much. At my age I would have expected all the urges of youth to have faded away. But it does not appear to be so. The mere sight of you, even the thought about you, kindles a thousand fires in me. Though cheerful on 19/2, you nonetheless looked a bit ill and the tiny pools of water in your eyes drowned the love and tenderness they always radiate. But the knowledge of what I have enjoyed in the last twenty years made me feel that love even though physically denied by illness.

On 29/10 you were even more queenly and desirable in your deep green dress and I thought you were lucky that I could neither reach nor confide to you how I felt. Sometimes I feel like one who is on the sidelines, who has missed life itself.

Travelling with you to work in the morning, phoning you during the day, touching your hand or hugging you as you moved up and down the house, enjoying your delicious dishes, the unforgettable hours in the bedroom, made life taste like honey. These are things I cannot forget.

21 January, 1979

You may not know that one of my best moments in the old days was to listen to youngsters' compliments of Dadewethu, youngsters who were also caught in the web of intrigue. Mother tried to spin around her.

2 September, 1979



I love you all the time, in the miserable and cold winter days and when all the beauty, sunshine and warmth of summer returns. My joy when you're bursting with laughter is beyond measure. This is how I always think of you: our Mum with plenty to keep her occupied, with a smiling face whatever the circumstances.

10 February, 1980

On 30/8 I was hardly out of the visiting rooms and I thought of you as I walked back to the cell. I said to myself, there goes Msuthu like a bird in hand returning to the bush, to the wild jungle and the wide world. I miss you, Mhlophe, and love you! Devotedly, Dalibunga

1 October 1975

These days I spend some time thinking of you both as Dadwethu, Mum, pal and mentor. What you perhaps don't know is how often I think and actually picture in my mind all that makes you up physically and spiritually: the shape of your forehead, shoulders, limbs, the loving remarks which come daily, and the blind eye you've always turned against those numerous shortcomings that would have frustrated another woman. Sometimes it is a wonderful experience to sit alone and think back about previous moments spent with you, darling. I even remember a day when you were bulging with Zindzi, struggling to cut your nails. I now recall this with a sense of shame. I could have done it for you. Whether or not I was conscious of it, my attitude was: I've done my duty, a second brat is on the way, the difficulties that you're now facing as a result of your physical conditions are now all yours.

15 April, 1976

Your love and devotion has created a debt which I will never attempt to pay back. So enormous is it that even if I had to pay regular instalments for another century I would not settle it. All I can say Mum is *Nangamiso!*

21 July, 1979

The tenderness and intimacy which exists between a man and his Mum, Dad, and the

special friend that you are. This particular relationship carries with it something that cannot be separated from self.

21 January, 1979

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Your affectionate letters, Xmas, birthday and wedding anniversary messages always arrive at the right moment, leaving me with the hope of getting an equally stimulating letter the following month. Hearing from the same person every week for fourteen years should have created that familiarity which takes away the freshness and joy of novelty. But I light up immediately your letter comes and I feel like flying where eagles cannot reach. Although I know your ability to put things simply and clearly, I was at once attracted by the beautiful way in which you summed up our eighteen years together—eighteen years of the greatest horror in your life. That message,

**Winnie made every visit an event for Mandela to remember and relish, presenting herself with meticulous care, in toiletry, jewellery and in the dress chosen for the occasion**



**Winnie Mandela with her grandchildren: a high-souled and tolerant shepherdess**

as usual, shocked and thrilled me all at once.

19 July, 1976

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In times like these I miss you more than ever before. I have told you many times before about the simple things in life that I have missed most these last sixteen years with you in Jeppe, Chancellor, boxing tournaments, music festivals, film shows, at Ngongq's in the open veld, the unforgettable days at 8115 and the greatest of all moments—closing the bedroom door.

19 November, 1979

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Your letters are more than a tonic and I

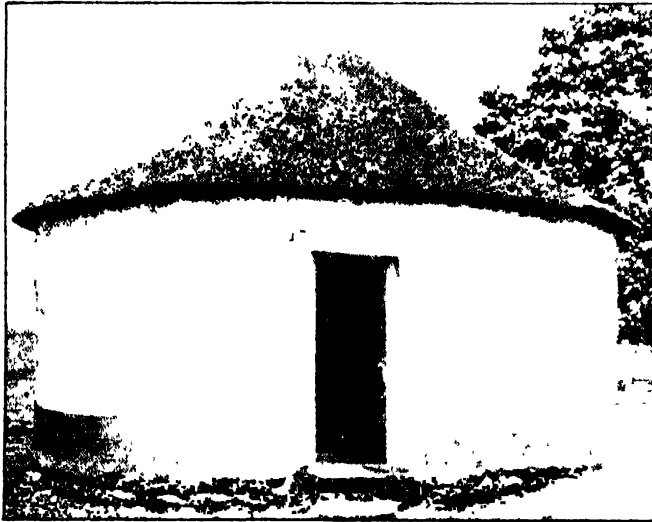


feel different every time I hear from you even when you don the mantle of Nogq-washu and sting me from every direction. Such stings have come to be part of our life, our mutual love and our happiness. They give me some idea of the ravages and damage caused on us by the life of hardship that we must live. On such occasions I always concentrate on the salutation or on the very last words in the concluding paragraph.

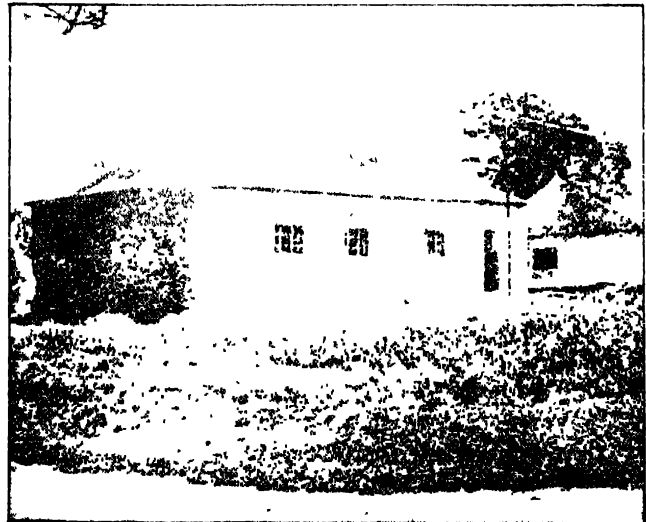
31 March, 1983

### To Zindzi, recalling Winnie's jealousy

On Saturday after 1 pm, and about a month before Mum and I got married, she came with friends to fetch me from the office and found me waiting for the secret-



The hut in which Nelson Mandela lived from late 1920 to 1939; (right) his first school: a humble beginning



ary of a foreign statesman with whom I'd an appointment. Like Mum, she was shatteringly beautiful and about the same age, and although they had not met, Mum was at once surprisingly hostile. Then I was in top physical condition and going to the gym regularly. In spite of all that, and in the presence of onlookers, she caught me by the scruff of the neck and dragged me out. I never saw that lady again. On another occasion when Zeni was still suckling, we were having supper when a comrade came and asked me to drive one of Mum's lady friends to what was then Sophiatown. The Ngutyana at once retired to the bedroom, literally shaking with anger. I kissed and rubbed her gently between the shoulders and she cooled down. I'm quite ashamed to say it, darling, but I must tell you that, in spite of the raw deal she gave me those days, Mum soon settled down. Today we've a high-souled and tolerant shepherdess who has made a man of me.

4 September, 1977

### Anniversaries

The Mandelas commemorate birthdays whenever possible, and wedding anniversaries almost without exception, in prison during official visits. The occasions are, in addition, observed with cards and letters. Nelson recalls his and Winnie's wedding day in the following extract.

I remember 14 June nostalgically. In spite of the difficult times, we went to the altar. The treason trial, confined to Johannesburg, the debts that were piling up, the inability to honour obligations, on occasions remaining in the background when she had every right to share the limelight, all these things shock me as nothing else has ever done before. That was our cross which I hope we carried reasonably well. I spent a lot of time on this day thinking of

you. Every time I do, I literally glow and long to embrace you and feel the electric shocks that your flesh rubs onto me—your navel and heartbeat. Three years from now we celebrate our Silver Jubilee—where and how? Till we meet again.

29 June, 1980

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His mind rests on times past, of relations who have died, of things he ought to have done and did not.

Dear Sister, today we have been together for nineteen years. Many things have happened in that time. C. K. Nozipho, Phyllis, Tshawuza Ntwasa and Makahulu who were at our wedding are all gone. So is Ma who welcomed you as a bride to our new home and Thembi, whom you loved as your own child. May they all rest in peace. I remembered you with a real feast on 26 September [Winnie's birthday]. I put four teaspoons of Nespray powdered milk in a mug, 3 teaspoons of Milo, 2 teaspoons of brown sugar and buried the whole mixture



in hot water. It was a magnificent brew fit for a monarch

1 October, 1975

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I wish I could drive you on a long, long journey just as I did on 12/6/58, with the one difference that this time I'd prefer us to be alone. I've been away from you for so long that the very first thing I would like to do on my return would be to take you away from that suffocating atmosphere, drive you along carefully, so that you could have the opportunity of breathing fresh and clean air, seeing the beauty spots of South Africa, its green grass and trees, colourful wild flowers, sparkling streams, animals grazing in the open veld and be able to talk to the simple people we meet along the road. Our first stop would be to the place where Ma Rhadebe and CK [Winnie's parents] sleep. I hope they lie next to each



other. Then I would be able to pay my respect to those who have made it possible for me to be as happy and free as I am now. Perhaps the stories I've so much wanted to tell you all these years would begin there. The atmosphere should probably sharpen your ears and restrain me to concentrate on those aspects which are tasty, edifying and constructive. Thereafter, we would adjourn and resume next to Mphakanyiswa and Nosekeni [Nelson's parents] where the environment would be similar. I believe we would then be fresh and solid as we drive back to 8115.

29 June, 1976

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## Regret, nostalgia, dreams

Nelson's letters reflect the volumes that remain unsaid because of the censorship rules that prescribe and proscribe the thoughts of a prisoner. The one thing that he could have expressed freely was remorse and regret.

There is not a glimmer of this in any of his letter with regard to the position he has adopted about his country and its freedom and that of his people.

The regrets he does express are about the time he could have spent with his family. There is an underlying consciousness of the price his children have had to pay for the father who withdrew from his family and gave himself to the people, of the husband who left his young wife to serve his country, a consciousness of their pain when he was not there, when they needed him as an intimate, personal presence.

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## To Winnie

I lead a life where I hardly have enough time even to think.

15 April, 1976

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Our daughters raised in hardship are grown women today. The first born has her own house and is raising her family.

We couldn't fulfil our wishes, as we had planned, to have a baby boy. I had hoped to build you refuge, no matter how small, so that we would have a place for rest and sustenance before the arrival of the sad, dry days. I fell down and couldn't do these things. I am as one building castles in the air.

26 June, 1977

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My arrest for treason on 5/12/56 and the lengthy proceedings that followed worsened the position. The world around me literally crumbled, income disappeared and many obligations could not be honoured. Only the coming of Ngutvana [Winnie] into the picture helped to bring about a bit of order to my personal affairs. But the chaos had gone too far even for her to bring back the stability and easy life I had just begun to lack when misfortune struck.

It is all these things which keep turning up as the mind strays over days in the Golden City. But this soul-searching melts away altogether when I think of Mum and all the children, of the pride and joy you all give me. Among us is Nobutho [Zindzi], the beautiful Mantu whose love and loyalty, visits, letters, birthday and Xmas cards are essential parts in the efforts of the family to help me endure many of the challenges of the last two decades.

1 March, 1981

**In a letter to Winnie, Nelson Mandela says, "I love you all the time. In the miserable and cold winter days and when all the beauty, sunshine and warmth of the summer returns"**



(Far left) Winnie Mandela: a pillar of strength; Nelson Mandela after his release: back in the mainstream



**"Your letters, Xmas, birthday and wedding anniversary messages always arrive at the right moment...I light up immediately...I feel like flying where eagles cannot reach," wrote Mandela to Winnie**



**Nelson Mandela with wife, Winnie: the long years of separation have brought them closer**

The regrets and anxieties prod him, in his dreams which are vivid, often harrowing, nightmares, at times pleasant sublimations.

I've plans, wishes and hopes. I dream and build castles. But one has to be realistic. We're mere individuals in a society run by powerful institutions with its conventions, norms, morals, ideals and attitudes.

1 September, 1975

I don't know how to interpret these dreams. But they at least indicate that there is far less steel in me than I had thought, that distance and two decades of separation have not strengthened the steel in me and deepened my anxiety over the family.

28 June, 1980

I had a long dream as if it went on the whole night. It started in the mountains, across the Orange River. We were walking on green grass beside a clean stream, holding hands like we did before Zeni and

Zindzi were born. We were in Brandfort and we travelled to Kroonstad where we met a lot of friends. All Ngutyanas and Dhlomos and our relations were there.

23 April, 1978

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Last month's dreams put you and me at the bottom of Selborne Road. We got a lift to First Avenue and then walked to King's bioscope. But we never reached it because you blocked my way and pestered me with affectionate kisses. These are mere dreams, but dreams I like to have.

27 May, 1979

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The world is truly round and seems to start and end with those we love. In this regard the 23/6 was one of those unforgettable nights when the subconscious opened up a romantic world, with all the wonderful thrills I have missed. A lady sat on the floor with her legs stretched out as our mothers used to relax in the old days. Though I can't remember the actual words, she sang with a golden voice, the

face radiating affection and fire a woman can give a man. She turned and twisted her arms. That lady was none other than our darling Mum. These moments are increasing and make life worthwhile in spite of everything. I love you.

1 July, 1979

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Perpetual dreams about those we love! On the night of 21/9 you and I were driving the Olds at corner of Eloff and Market when you rushed out and spewed out porridge. It was hard and old with a crust on top. Your whole body quivered as each lump came out and you complained of a sharp pain on your right shoulder. I held you tight against my body, unmindful of the curious crowd and the traffic jam. I was still quite upset when I got up but was immediately happy when I realized that it was all but a dream.

26 June, 1979

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I dreamt I was with the young men of my kraal. They gave me herbs to



strengthen me against you. They were saying that I should fight with you so that you would run away. And you were shouting at me to throw away those leaves, they were bad medicine. A whole audience was listening to this conversation. I threw the leaves away.

16 July, 1978

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On 20/6 I woke up to see Ngutyana and her man travelling from Brandfort to Johannesburg. They came across two opposing regiments of boys facing one another across a wide stream and spoiling for a fight. For security reasons we separated but I kept you under observation all long the line. The scenery was breathtaking as I watched down the fall towards the river below. Suddenly I was horrified when I noticed that you had disappeared and I rushed across the valley to check. There you were bathing unconcerned in the river with two girls. But when I reached the spot I discovered that all three were strange boys and you were nowhere to be found.

Panic again welled up and as I set out to search the area, I saw you lying flat on the Transvaal side of river shaking from high fever. A Bloemfontein official had walked past you and refused your request for a doctor. It was with an agitated mind I woke up. I had a similar dream on the night of the 26/6. I was playing dominoes with three friends when I again saw you lying in a spot with giant pine trees and thick undergrowth. This time a hospital attendant brought hot water, sterilizing instruments and swabs for your treatment. Only then did I realize how ill you were. I rushed and embraced you. Later we reached a town where I had lived away from you for years. It was so flattering for me to show you around the place.

29 June, 1980

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My dreams tell the same story and keep on reminding me that I can't break away from the spell in which I was caught twenty-two years ago. The other night both Zeni and Zindzi dragged me to a second-hand shop



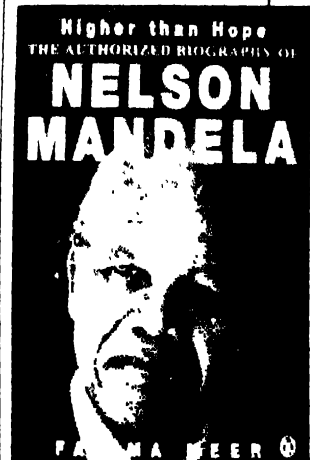
Zindzi Mandela and her daughter on their way to the jail to celebrate Christmas: a time for togetherness

in Eloff Street between Commissioner and Main Street to get some household furniture that we badly needed. When I woke on the morning of 25/2 I was missing you and the children a great deal as always.

14 April, 1976

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I had one of my perpetual dreams. Returning home late in fact, towards dawn, I raced through the house and met you as you staggered through the back door looking sickly and depressed. I embraced you for some time, feeling guilty and unable to look at you straight in the face. In the dream Zindzi was still a baby of about eighteen months and I was stunned when I discovered that she had swallowed a razor blade. It was such a relief when she spewed it out. I dreamt about you and the girls on the following day. This time Zindzi asked me to kiss her. When I did she complained that my kiss lacked warmth. Zeni also insisted on a kiss and appeared to be satisfied.

1 June, 1980



Higher Than Hope: The Authorized Biography of Nelson Mandela by Fatima Meer. Published by Penguin Books. Price: Rs 115



## Ministerial whim

■ The days of the autocratic minister, evidently, are not over. The minister of state for agriculture, Nitish Kumar, eager to reach Patna, "forcibly" diverted the route of flight IC-409 between Delhi and Calcutta, with utter disregard for the other passengers. When it was announced at Lucknow airport, that the plane would go first to Ranchi, instead of Patna, Kumar threatened to launch a



dharna if the plane did not go to Patna first. The flight which was already four hours late, was further delayed as the passengers tried to persuade Kumar to change his mind. None of this worked, however, and the plane took off for Patna, skipping Ranchi altogether. A minister, as usual, had his way.

## The green view

■ Beginning from August, Doordarshan is planning to telecast a programme on environment every night. The Union environment and forest ministry has presently been assigned 100 minutes at 10.30 pm every alternate week. But Union minister of state for environment and forests Maneka Gandhi is reportedly not happy with this, and has asked for three-minute, 10-minute and 23-minute slots every day to drive home the message on the need to conserve environment. Maneka's programmes will also feature an



environment quiz by Siddharth Basu. The ministry's budget for TV programmes, however, is only Rs 33 lakhs, so the minister is now on the lookout for a sponsor. Any takers?

## Setting an example

■ A literacy programme in Kerala's Palghat district has been launched by a band of

determined youngsters who are all set to convert the area into the second most literate district of the state by the middle of 1991. Though the enthusiastic social workers often have to face ridicule from elderly villagers who think education is no big deal, the band of youngsters is trying to overcome these problems. The aim of the programme is to teach everyone their mother tongue, whether it is Tamil, Kannada, Telugu or Malayalam.



## THIS INDIA

**MADRAS:** The claim was as improbable as it was ingenious. Rani of Ketti village in the Nilgiri district, stubbornly stuck to her claim that she had married Bheeman "by post" and was the rightful heir to his provident fund and insurance money after his death. When the issue reached the court, Justice Thirunavakkarasu refused to have anything to do with the claim. He said that the "postal marriage" was not recognised by the Hindu Marriage Act. Even though Bheeman had appointed Rani as his heir, it was not considered valid by the court—*Sunday Mail* (S. Siva Kumar, Madras)



ILLUSTRATIONS: DEBASIS DEB

delivered on 12 April this year to his brother in a village in India. The addressee, Kuldip Chand Mahajan, a former sarpanch, died nine years ago—*The Sentinel* (S. Krishnan, Guwahati)

**HAJIPUR:** Six activists of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad were arrested by the police on charges of misbehaviour with the civil surgeon-cum-chief medical officer. According to sources, the civil surgeon was locked in a toilet in the hospital campus for about half an hour in protest against the scarcity of medicines and the unhygienic conditions prevailing in the hospital. The district magistrate rushed to the spot and ordered criminal proceedings against the students—*The Times of India* (Susan Martin, New Delhi)

**BANGALORE:** A bridegroom who allegedly received Rs 20,000 as dowry, failed to turn up for his marriage. The police are on the lookout for the "missing" bridegroom following a complaint filed by the bride's brother, who had to cancel the wedding after the guests had arrived—*The Telegraph* (Chandrika Gopalan, Calcutta)



BEGINNING 27 MAY 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



A fairly good week except for one snag; your health might cause you some problems. Also, do not overstrain yourself. Postpone your decisions for the moment. Do not hesitate to take the advice of elders.

**Good dates:** 27, 31 and 2  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 7  
**Favourable direction:** West

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



This is a week of slow and steady progress. Delays and obstacles on the professional front should be tackled with patience and tact. The time is ripe for romance. Children will be a source of joy for you.

**Good dates:** 29, 30 and 31  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 5 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** North

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



A fair measure of success is in store for you. Prospects are bright on the financial front. You are likely to inherit some property. The time is ripe for speculation and gambling. This is the right time to pursue correspondence.

**Good dates:** 28, 29 and 2  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** East

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



A good week lies ahead of you. Your love life will take a very surprising turn. For others, the period is good for socialising. Financially, this is a fairly good week, but check extravagance.

**Good dates:** 27, 28 and 30  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3 and 5  
**Favourable direction:** South-east

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



An excellent week for businessmen. Rely on your intuition and you will be successful in the deals you make. Servicemen will have a busy week. The domestic front may not be peaceful.

**Good dates:** 29, 31 and 2  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** North-east

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



This is a lucky week for those seeking jobs; new avenues will open up for them. Those in service may look forward to a promotion or a transfer. The period is favourable for artists and sportsmen.

**Good dates:** 30, 31 and 2  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** West

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



This may prove to be a good week for you. But refrain from taking any decisions. Exercise tact and patience with those at home. Your health might be a source for worry.

**Good dates:** 28, 30 and 1  
**Lucky numbers:** 5, 7 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** South

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



A good week for romance, courtship and marriage. However, do not take unnecessary risks or hasty decisions. Your relatives will contribute to your happiness. A favourable week for those in service.

**Good dates:** 27, 29 and 1  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 4 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** East

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



This is a favourable week for romance. Some of you might get married in the near future. Make the best of the present situation. The luckier ones may be rewarded with promotions. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 31, 1 and 2  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** North

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



Disputes and controversies are in store for you this week. Those in service will come in for severe criticism from their superiors. The domestic front looks bright. Romance is in the offing.

**Good dates:** 29, 30 and 1  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 7 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** South-east

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



A pleasant week lies ahead of you. Your past problems and worries will be finally over. The professional front will be bright for you. Romance is on the cards. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 28, 29 and 30  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 6 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** West

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



This is not a very good week for you and your family. Exercise tact and patience on the domestic front and your problems will be solved. Keep a watch on the health of family members.

**Good dates:** 27, 28 and 31  
**Lucky numbers:** 6, 7 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** North

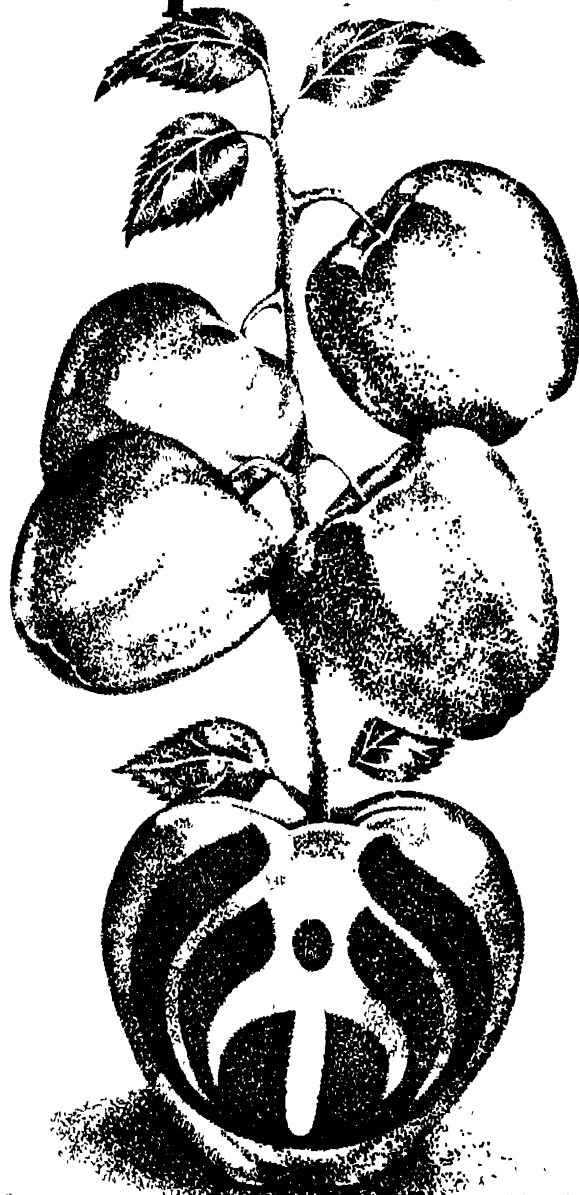
## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—LEO

*Both the partners will be sexually compatible. But the Leo man's egotism sometimes gets on the Libran woman's nerves. However, his warmth, gregariousness and generosity endear him to her. He is enraptured by her charm. ♦*



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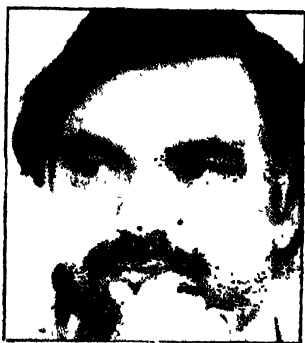
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## Mutt and Jeff and Jeff and Jeff

■ Lalit Suri maybe down but he's not out. Though the Raja's government has indicated that it will not spare Suri, who is currently recovering from heart surgery at the Escorts Heart Hospital, he is not without friends.

Among those who have visited him are Rajiv Gandhi, L.K. Advani and Shatrughan Sinha (see interview on pg 52). Captain Satish



**Lalit Suri: still popular**

Sharma, of course, still plays Mutt to Suri's Jeff.

What ought to concern the Raja is the attendance of those close to him. Among them: Ajeya Singh's father-in-law and members of the Jethmalani family.



**Satish Sharma: concerned**

## The tooth involves us all

■ Say this for Shabana Azmi, she knows how to make her presence felt. Two weeks ago, Prime Minister V.P. Singh flew to Bombay to attend the 40th

HEARD IN SRINAGAR

**He upsets my rhythm.**

JAGMOHAN TO THE PMO ABOUT GEORGE FERNANDES' VISITS TO HIS STATE



**Shabana Azmi: securing her interests**

anniversary celebrations of *Current*, the Bombay-based tabloid. He did so, he told the audience, because of the role played by Ayub Syed, *Current's* editor, in ousting the Congress(I)

regime and getting VP made Prime Minister.

Fair enough. If that's what the Raja wants to do, then he has every right to do it. But how does Shabana Azmi, toothy art film ac-

tress and godmother to the Children's Film Society, figure in all this?

Because there, at the tarmac to receive Singh was Azmi. She was much in evidence at the function too, siding up to the Raja and asking 'sincere' questions about the Narmada Dam. (He did not take her seriously and answered with a joke.)

As Miss Azmi is neither a member of *Current's* editorial staff nor a member of the Janata Dal, perhaps she was just performing as a groupie.

Or perhaps, she was ensuring the future of a political career.

## Silent seething

■ Nobody seems to have noticed but Nathuram Mirdha, minister for food and civil supplies, is seething. At the last reshuffle, he found that he had a new minister of state: Ram Pujan Patel.



**Nathuram Mirdha: infuriated**

Patel is a buddy of the Raja's and has all but taken over the running of the ministry. Moreover, he keeps a watch on Mirdha and lets the PMO know what's going on.

If only somebody cared that Mirdha is so angry! ●

## CALCULATOR

### The world's richest non-resident Indians

■ **The Hinduja's:** Love them or hate them: there's no denying that they are the richest Indians in the world.

■ **The Shirdesanis:** Ten or 12 years ago, they could have challenged the Hinduja's but recent managerial troubles in Nigeria have hurt them.

■ **The Sethias:** In 1983, Raj Sethia was worth \$250 million but after he went bust and took Ranjit with him, only Nirmal remains in the \$100 million plus category.

■ **Vijay Mallya:** An unusual entrant to the list but as he now lives in Britain he counts as an NRI millionaire. Definitely division one.

■ **Menu Chhabria:** His true worth is more elusive than Mallya's but there's no doubt that he's now in the big league.

■ **Swraj Paul:** He says he's worth the £80 million or so that Caparo's balance sheets show but others claim that there are substantial off-shore assets.

■ **Also division one:** The Chellarams, the Chanra's, the Chandenas and Bagri.

■ **Division two:** The Harilelas, the Lalvanis, the Melwanis and the Nizam of Hyderabad.

■ **Division three:** Juggi Tandon, Ravi Tikoo, Rajan Pillai, the Aswanis.



## To cap it all

■ Baba Amte's *dharna* may or may not succeed in getting the Narmada project stalled, but it has already had one effect. The Raja appeared without his cap. Though photographers clicked away, V.P. Singh actually forgot about his vanity and let his pate be snapped.



V.P. Singh: a change of image

Moreover, bowing to criticism that it is silly to wear a fur-like cap in summer, V.P. Singh has now taken to wearing a semi-Nepali style cotton cap.

Or perhaps, he's just trying to improve relations with Nepal!

## The distant Lotus

■ The BJP's disillusionment with the government is becoming less and less concealed. Though there is little doubt that the BJP calls the shots in many important respects, its members are in the enviable position of being able to distance themselves from their actions.

Some instances of their growing rift.

• At the current anniversary functions in

### HEARD IN SOUTH BLOCK

**Natwar's joke about our high commissioner to Southall was funny when he first cracked it—17 years ago.**

A DIPLOMAT COMPLAINING ABOUT NATWAR SINGH'S CLAIM THAT OUR LONDON MISSION WAS ACCREDITED TO SOUTHALL, NOT WHITEHALL

Bombay, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa claimed that the country was in flames while the Prime Minister did nothing. V.P. Singh who was on the dais squirmed with embarrassment.

• Patwa's political mentor, Sardar Angre, has also fallen out with his old buddies in the *Express* lobby. The bone of contention: Angre and Dr J.K. Jain's links with the Ambanis.

• The BJP will launch a huge attack on the government over the issue of statehood to New Delhi. The official proposal is, according to BJP leaders, shamefully inadequate. Ea-



Patwa: embarrassing the PM

ger to pre-empt this, the Delhi unit of the Janata Dal has tried to indicate its own displeasure but this lacks

## BAROMETER

### How they rate at the court in exile



**R.K. Dhawan:** Early hopes that his Rajya Sabha nomination was a means of kicking him upstairs have now receded. Dhawanji continues to exert his old influence on party matters.



**P. Chidambaram:** The rising star. He has made himself invaluable to Rajiv Gandhi and is increasingly listened to on issues. Coordinates parliamentary affairs



**Shella Dixit:** After her father-in-law Uma Shankar Dixit's resignation from the working committee, she is totally out of favour.



**Setish Sharma:** Out in the cold, after the FIR on the Sanjay Singh shooting. However, there are signs that he may make a comeback because the entire party believes that he is being victimised.



**M.L. Fotedar:** Renominated to the Rajya Sabha but marginalised by Dhawan. Is rarely consulted on political matters. But you can never count him out

the credibility of the BJP's attack.

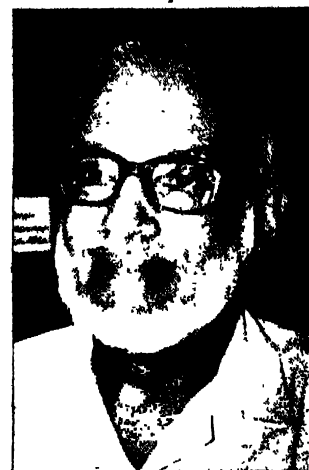
• Madan Lal Khurana openly attacked Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's claim that Hindu refugees from Kashmir had been given Rs 5,000 as an *ex-gratia* payment. They had received no money, said Khurana.

## Where's my office?

■ There is some heart-burning in the Congress(I) over the allocation of offices on the ground floor of Parliament House. Rajiv Gandhi has been given 37 while Shiv Shankar has 38. (Arun Nehru has 39 but that's another story.)

Because Rajiv needs a bigger room, he has appropriated 38 and turned it into an office for V. George, his PA, and Shiv Shankar.

But when the session of Parliament opened, Con-



M.G.K. Menon: sharing his office premises

gressmen were shocked to find that part of 38 had been walled off and allotted to M.G.K. Menon. That meant that George, Shiv Shankar and Menon all shared one room (though with walls separating them).

Congress(I) MPs say that Menon as a minister of state is not entitled to a ground-floor office. But the government is not budging.



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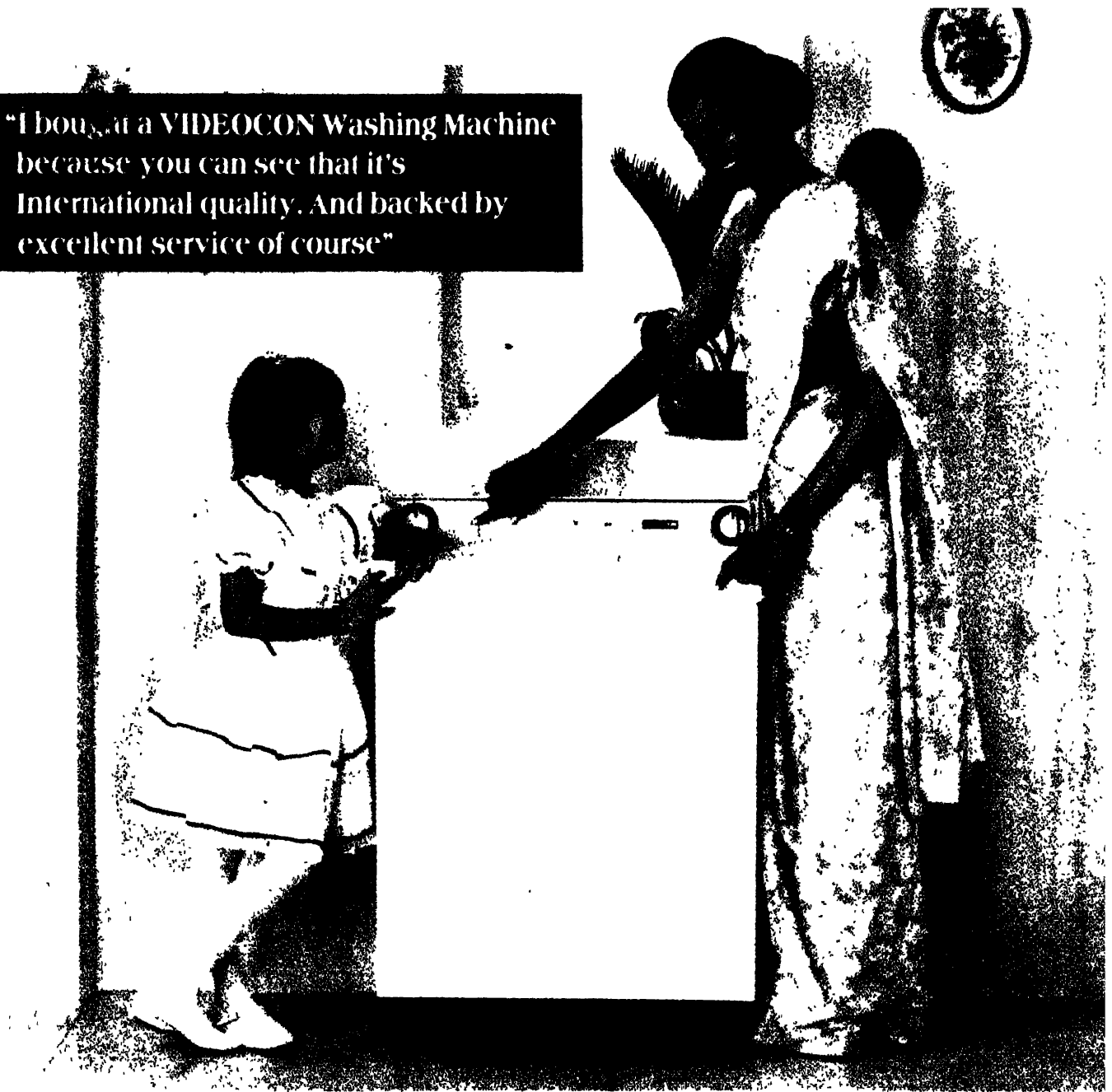
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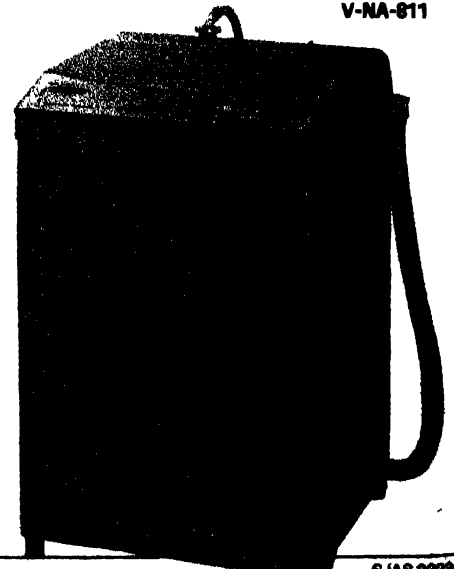
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**A320: THE CHAOS CONTINUES**

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MAGAZINE**

# CRISIS

**— V. P. Singh survives?**



*What did Flo Jo of the U.S. say  
to the Skypak Man?*

*"And you thought, you were  
the only one who could smile  
while moving at  
record-breaking speed?"*



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## The spirit of 1979

As the cracks become apparent, doubts are raised about the government's ability to last its term

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## Tiger tale

Despite losing the Assembly elections, the Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray is still a force to reckon with in Maharashtra



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## More smoke than fire

The real threat to Kanha is the Naxalite menace and not the much-publicised fire



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The Moulvi is killed, the police fire on innocent mourners, Governor Jagmohan resigns—hopes for peace in the Kashmir Valley are now pinned on Girish Saxena, the new Governor

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## From the mouths of the poets

Excerpts from *My Son's Father*, the autobiography of Dom Moraes

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## Happy to be this way

*Bombay Dost*, India's first magazine for homosexuals, ushers in the gay revolution



# SUNDAY

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**Cover transparency:**

Gautam Patole

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## Time for action

**T**he cover story (*How well are they doing*, 13—19 May) was timely. It's almost five months since the National Front government came to power in Delhi and it is time the nation had a look at their report card. In the past few months prices of all com-

modities have shot up, thanks largely to the budget. The law and order situation too has worsened and Punjab and Kashmir continue to burn. It is time V. P. Singh and his colleagues did something constructive. The electorate is already growing impatient. If the PM fails to deliver, it won't be long before the voters throw him out.

**Manju Chowdhury, Asansol (West Bengal)**

■ The write-up was absorbing. It is high time the PM

paid attention to some of the problems facing the country. In Punjab, terrorists' activities have increased to an alarming extent. In Kashmir, militants are having a field day: the cold-blooded murder of Mushir-ul-Haq and H.L. Khara is evidence of their strength. Prices have skyrocketed in the past few months and the squabbles within the Janata Dal still persist (Devi Lal vs Ajit Singh, George Fernandes vs Mufti Mohammad Sayeed to name a few). Moreover the allies of the National Front seem to be disillusioned with V. P. Singh. While confusion reigns supreme, the country suffers in silence and the PM watches helplessly. Surely, the electorate did not wish to replace one corrupt and in-



**Securitymen in a troubled area in Srinagar: when will peace return?**

Pakistan. Our neighbour should realise by now that abetting terrorism in India is not in the interests of the sub-continent and the move could backfire. Both India and Pakistan should try and solve their problems across the table and not on the battlefield.

After all, one can never pay too high a price for peace.

**Pramod Valsangkar, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)**

■ It is in the interest of all concerned that Article 370 should not be raised at this juncture, as it can have a very demoralising and damaging effect. The National Front government would do well to woo back the disillusioned Kashmiris, disappointed by the policies of the previous regime. This, however, cannot be achieved by bullets or laathis. It must be remembered that it is the unity of India which is at stake.

**Siddam Kondalah, Secunderabad (Andhra Pradesh)**

## Clarifying confusions

**T**his is with reference to the news item which appeared in SUNDAY magazine of 8 April, 1990. This press item refers to the purported conversation between finance secretary Mr Bimal Jalan and Mrs Man-

eka Gandhi. This is to clarify that prior to issue of your press item Mrs Maneka Gandhi had neither met nor spoken to Mr Bimal Jalan.

**V.M. Singh, private secretary to the minister of state, environment and forests, Government of India, New Delhi.**

■ In the *Delhi diary* section of SUNDAY (29 April—5 May, 1990) it has been wrongly reported that the minister of state for environment and forests, Smt Maneka Gandhi, had 'handed out a public dressing-down' to the secretary, Planning Commission, re-



**Maneka Gandhi: misunderstood**

cently for alleged non-action in the allocation of funds for the Ganga Action Plan. The fact is that the question of funds for the Ganga Action Plan for the Annual Plan 1990-91 for the ministry of environment and forests had come up for discussion on January 19, 1990, when the



**V.P. Singh with his Cabinet colleagues: poor performance**

modities have shot up, thanks largely to the budget. The law and order situation too has worsened and Punjab and Kashmir continue to burn.

It is time V. P. Singh and his colleagues did something constructive. The electorate is already growing impatient. If the PM fails to deliver, it won't be long before the voters throw him out.

efficient government by another equally sloppy one.

**S. Sengupta, Bombay (Maharashtra)**

## Trouble in paradise

**T**he cover story (*War?* 6—12 May) made interesting reading. It is a well-known fact that Pakistan is assisting terrorists in Punjab and Kashmir. All patriotic Indians should come out strongly against the unwarranted actions of



minister of state for environment had called on the deputy chairman, Planning Commission, to press the case for adequate allocations for the various programmes of the ministry.

During the meeting, there was a discussion on the subject between the deputy chairman, Planning Commission, and the minister of state in which the secretary had also participated. There was, however, no "dressing-down" of the secretary by the minister of state for environment and forests.

**M.K. Bajpai, information officer, Planning Commission and ministry of planning and programme implementation**

## The ideal option

**K**P Bhattarai's concept of an ideal democracy, where the King or the head of the state is not a mere puppet, reveals that he is gifted with political foresight (*Mutiny*, 5—12 May). The Nepalese Prime Minister's belief in this special brand of democracy is understandable since it is extremely suitable to the



**K.P. Bhattarai: visions of an ideal democracy**

temperament of the people of the sub-continent. The multi-racial, multi-lingual ethnic groups that co-exist in the sub-continent need a binding force to hold them together. The monarch, suggests Bhattarai, will perform that role in Nepal.

**T.S. Bisht, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)**

## Irreconcilable differences

**I** hold no brief in the government, at the same time our so called brilliant people like Mani Shankar Aiyar, Natwar Singh *et al* should grasp the following which are axiomatic (*Diplomatic drift*, 13—19 May).

- Even if India surrenders Kashmir and Punjab to Pakistan, there will be no dilution in Pakistan's anti-India stance owing to irreconcilable religious factors validated by the Indian History



**Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto**

- All Muslim nations will support Pakistan even if India is right (recent statements of Saudi Arabia and Iran validates this hypothesis).

- Even if the standard of living of Kashmiris becomes comparable to the USA the inhabitants of the Valley will still vote against India if a fair plebiscite is held. No wonder India has successfully evaded the issue.

- India can earn respect from the comity of nations only if it becomes an economic and military giant consistent with its size. Mere platitudes and broadcast of ancient wisdom will not cut ice.

Given the above premises India has to totally reorient its policy and relations with the rest of the world



**Meenakshi Seshadri: unfair criticism?**

be it the government or Opposition when it comes into power.

**E.N. Shankar, Bombay (Maharashtra)**

## Unfortunate accusation

**I**t is unfair to label Meenakshi Seshadri as a 'flop-machine' (*Khaas Baat*), 6—12 May).

The author should understand that a film's success depends a lot on the director. It is he who moulds the actor/actress according to the needs of the story.

There have been many instances when directors have catapulted unknown actors and actresses into superstar dom and on the other hand, have produced super-flops with megastars.

**T.S. Bisht, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)**

- The accusation was unwarranted. Meenakshi Seshadri is a fine actress. If her films have not been doing good business it is the fault of the directors and the script-writers. If a film has a weak storyline and is badly directed, it will certainly not work wonders at the box-office. But to blame an individual for the flop is extremely unfair. Meenakshi Seshadri is surely not a 'flop-machine' as the write-up suggests—even if the script is bad, she does her best to put up a

credible performance.

**Meena Rao, Amethi (Uttar Pradesh)**

- By calling Meenakshi Seshadri a 'flop-machine' the author has not only insulted a dedicated actress but has also revealed an extremely biased attitude. There are very few people in the Bombay filmworld, who have not delivered a string of flops at one point of their career or the other. Even Amitabh Bachchan is passing through a lean phase. Surely it does not mean that the superstar has become a 'flop-machine'. Lean patches come and go—they are hardly the yardstick to measure a star's capabilities.

**Ratna Rai, New Delhi**

- The south has given Bombay scores of legendary actresses like Vajayantimala and Rekha. So the remark about the south being a birthplace of failed heroines was totally uncalled for.

**U.G. Ramchandran, Madras (Tamil Nadu)**

**SUNDAY** (6—12 May, 1990) contained a reference to an air-hostess called Sabena Shetty who had complained of an assault by another crew-member. We now understand that the surname was misspelt and that there is another air-hostess in Air India called Sabeena Shetty. We are happy to make it clear that she was not the subject of the article.

—Editor ●





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LIC is now a multi-dimensional organization but its primary concern will continue to be to provide life insurance cover to people.



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# Mango fool



There is nothing foolish about mango fool. On the contrary, when mangoes are not up to the mark they are expected to be, all you have to do is to pulp them, add judicious measures of cream and sugar, cool the mix in a freezer and—*voila*—you have a sweet dish which puts the best of fruit cocktails doused with maraschino to shame.

For those of us who live in the north-western part of the country, June is the real mango month. But ever since rail and air transport was pressed into service, we start the mango season in March and extend it to October. There are over 100 varieties of mangoes grown all over the country—half of India's trees are mangoes. Some variety or the other is airlifted to the capital from early spring. By the end of April, the most highly rated Alfonso, grown around Ratnagiri on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra, is available in Delhi—at a price few can pay. It is rightly known as 'the magic lamp' to be presented to people in power from whom you expect favours. Andhra has its own variety best suited for bribery known as the Imam Pasand (the Imam's choice) as well as 'Collector Sahib' Pandit Nehru's favourite was the Dussehri, grown in and around the orchards of Malihabad in Uttar Pradesh. He used to send a crate of Dussehri to Queen Elizabeth every summer. My favourite remains the Langra (lame) so named after a lame fakir of Delhi. There are lots of Langra orchards around Delhi but the most succulent varieties come from Uttar Pradesh. It has a slightly 'turpentine' flavour and is not recommended for those who have sensitive throats. Equally tasty are the Chausa, Rataul and the new hybrid Amrapalli. Whatever be your favourite, do not consume more than two or at the most three a day. Mangoes are highly laxative: *do ya teen, bas!*

I am not sure how the mango evolved. The fruit bears remarkable resemblance to the fruit of the neem tree, *niboli*. When ripe yellow it looks like a miniature mango and the texture of its pulp, though not the same taste, is like that of a mango. If it is an

evolution of the *niboli*, it must have taken place a million years ago. Certainly by the time of Kalidasa, the mango had evolved into its fullness because the poet goes lyrical over it. Alexander the Great, the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang and the Moor Ibn Baluta relished it. Though Babar thought it was highly over-rated, his grandson, Akbar, planted an extensive orchard of 1,00,000 trees in Darbhanga, known thereafter as Lakhi Bagh.

Indians' love for mangoes surpasses the Arabs' love for dates or the central Asians' love for water melons and Kandhar grapes. Mughal emperors and ladies of their harems invested their wealth in mango orchards. Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the august line, whose domain did not extend beyond the walls of Shahanabad, had some of the best varieties planted in the squarish garden in the Red Fort known as Hayat Baksh (life-giving). Delhi's most celebrated poet, Asadullah Khan Ghalib, was addicted to mangoes and shamelessly sponged on his royal master. Once when strolling with his patron in Hayat Baksh, he is reported to have said, "Your Majesty, I am told that every mango bears the name of the person it is meant for on

its seed-stone. I wonder if any of these growing in your garden have Ghalib's name imprinted on them."

Another poet-lover of mangoes who did not hesitate to ask for them was Akbar Ilahabadi. Once he wrote to a friend who owned a large orchard:

"Neither letter nor message from my beloved send to me,  
If you must send something this season,  
mangoes let them be  
Make sure there are some that I can keep  
to eat another day.  
If twenty are ripe add another ten that  
can stay.  
Your slave's address you know, it remains  
the same  
Despatch them to Allahabad in a parcel  
with my name  
Whatever you do, in your reply please be not so brash  
"Order for mangoes received  
First send  
the cash"

## Passing peacefully

To escape the scorching heat of the plains, the big guns of the government during British rule used to move up to Shimla for almost five months from mid-May to mid-October. The Viceroy and his large retinue always travelled by a special train which left Delhi at night and reached Kalka early next morning. Security was tightened all along the line and every station master was required to send a telegraphic message to Delhi as soon as the train passed his station. Of particular importance was the railway bridge over river Ghaggar near old Chandigarh (now called Chand Mandir) where the train usually arrived at about 4 am. The old station master there used to spend a sleepless night due to tension. There is a story that once in typical railway English, he sent the following telegram after the safe crossing of the train over the bridge. "His Excellency passed away peacefully"

(Contributed by P S Chawla, Chandigarh) ●

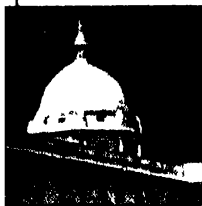


**Indians' love for mangoes surpasses the Arabs' love for dates or the central Asians' love for water melons and Kandhar grapes**



# Beefing up security

*But the proposed NSC is likely to achieve little*



Even in the midst of the grim goings-on in Kashmir, the diplomatic comings and goings on both sides of the subcontinental divide and the brisk preparations for the Bush-Gorbachev summit, some attention must be paid to the fiasco of the V.P. Singh government's effort to set up the country's first ever National Security Council (NSC).

It is not merely a case of the mountain in labour producing the proverbial measly mouse. It is worse

CCPA minus Tau Devi Lal. However, the whole point of having an NSC is to place at the disposal of the political leadership of the government, a body of experts in the whole gamut of subjects and disciplines relevant to national security (in its widest sense which is much more than mere military defence). Such a body, consisting of both officials and non-official analysts who agree to come in for a long-enough tenure, cannot be burdened with the grinding daily routine of the government, nor be allowed to be hag-ridden by the bureaucratic hierarchy.

ies, led by their headmaster, the Cabinet secretary. These are grossly overworked and often overbearing officers who would have neither the time nor the inclination to even read in full the documents produced by the NSC staff. Moreover, the bureaucrats included in the secretaries' committee under the high sounding title, the Strategic Policy Group, are the very people who, under the alias of Core Group or Defence Planning Committee, have repeatedly given themselves certificates of poverty. Why these worthies are anxious to have a formal place in the NSC structure is not at all clear because they were bound to be in attendance at the committee of ministers and later responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken. But even with them as some kind of a barrier, the proposal about the composition of the NSC's permanent staff and its functions was sound.

It is against this background that a virtual death blow to the whole project has been delivered in the final proposal tossed on the table of the defence consultative committee. The idea that the NSC should have an expert and independent staff has been inexplicably dropped. Instead, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), already an adjunct of the Cabinet secretariat, is to act as the NSC's staff. In the apt words of the BJP MP, Jaswant Singh, this is the "end of both the JIC and the NSC". The JIC has its hands full with collating and assessing the intelligence collected by various agencies. How on earth can it take on additional and vital tasks God alone knows. More seriously, the JIC can provide only one of the many inputs into the planning of national security policy. To make it the main instrument of policy planning is to have an arrangement far worse than the present one of taking *ad hoc* decisions from day to day, issue to issue and file to file.

Unless the Prime Minister takes corrective action even at this late stage, the whole exercise of setting up the NSC would become a laughing stock. •



**Unless Prime Minister V.P. Singh takes corrective action, the whole exercise of setting up the NSC would become a laughing stock**

In fact, what we have been witnessing is a classic case of the abominable no-men of the bureaucracy skilfully perverting and defeating the good intentions of an incoming government. Not to put any gloss on the situation, the Janata Dal government's proposals, as it stands after due doctoring by the Cabinet secretariat and two discussions in Parliament's consultative committee on defence, makes utter nonsense of the very concept of the NSC.

Doubtless, in a parliamentary system like ours (never mind Meham), the NSC cannot be a replica of the prototype that has existed in the United States. The Indian NSC's recommendations must be subject to the approval of the Cabinet and its committee on political affairs (CCPA) though no one can overlook that the ministerial composition of the NSC would be almost exactly that of the

In sum, the NSC must be a body of undisputed competence, reasonably autonomous from the soul-killing bureaucratic control and in direct communication with the head of the government so that it can, on a sustained and systematic basis, produce long-range security assessments and submit to the ministerial committee not just one recommendation but all possible options. The final decision, of course, must always be that of the elected government and implemented by the top officials of the ministries concerned—defence, external affairs, home, economic affairs and so on.

The original proposal that V.P. Singh had come forward with did provide for the kind of secretariat that the NSC must have according to the attributes outlined above. But he had needlessly interposed between the expert body and the ministerial committee at the top a committee of secretar-



## SIGHT AND SOUND



R.K. LAXMAN/THE TIMES OF INDIA



■ Mr V.P. Singh should not. I don't know what he should do, because I am not his adviser, but if he can't stop people from being killed in this country, he should step down.

**Rajiv Gandhi, AICC (I) president, on the recent events in Mehmud**

■ I will want him (Rajiv Gandhi) to announce here and now that he is not responsible for the situation that

occurred during the last Lok Sabha election in Amethi.

**V.P. SINGH, Prime Minister, in Parliament after the resignation of Om Prakash Chautala**

■ *Kya mei nahi chahata ki mera beta CM bane?* (Don't I want that my son should become chief minister?)

**DEVI LAL, deputy prime minister, on whether Ranjit Singh was a contender for the chief ministership of Haryana**

■ I believe it is extremely important for the Muslim *umma* (world) to raise its voice against what is happening in Kashmir.

**Benzar Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan**

■ Dr S.D. Sharma's hysterical rantings had not served the cause of democracy. The situation in the state is

instead aimed at gagging only the Opposition party and its members.

**K.K. TEWARI, former Union minister**

■ Pakistan must stop meddling in Kashmir affairs in order to keep friendly relations in our own country.

**MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAKEED, Union home minister**

■ Without mentioning names, I can say that we are all dedicated to certain ideals, unlike the earlier government which believed in wasteful expenditure.

**MADHU DANDAVATE, Union finance minister**

■ Taking advantage of what is happening in Kashmir, some people are trying to discredit a particular community. But what about the terrorist outfit of ULFA, whose members are all

Hindus, and yet they want Assam to secede from India.

**JYOTI BASU, West Bengal chief minister, on the recent communal violence in the Hooghly district**

■ If a girl is dancing in a skirt and if the camera shows her panty, its enjoyable. A thing of beauty is a joy forever.

**DEV ANAND, actor and director, on his recent venture Awaal Number**







I yield to no one in my admiration for L.C. Jain, Rajni Kothari, Rajmohan Gandhi and Arun Shourie. But these four fine individuals who played such a vital

role in effecting the overthrow of the Rajiv Gandhi regime might inadvertently cause the downfall of the National Front government. The path to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions. And though the motivations behind the removal of Om Prakash Chautala may be well-intentioned, they could pave the way for an early return of the Congress.

It may not appear so on the surface. Conventional wisdom has it that Mr V P Singh has triumphantly re-established his authority over the party and the government. Indeed, the Prime Minister in an uncharacteristic display of silliness 'turned the tables on the Opposition' and demanded that Rajiv Gandhi too should resign. As if the solitary shooting incident in Amethi—in which the candidate was only wounded—can bear comparison with the bloody goings-on in Meham.

Nevertheless, there is much jubilation in the Janata Dal. Chautala has quit, a new chief minister has smoothly been elected, Devi Lal has showered his blessings on the whole process, and the shout has been taken out of the Opposition's lungs. The Prime Minister is being vigorously urged to take courage from these developments and show similar firmness in the future. The 'real' V P. Singh has been discovered. The fuzzy cap and the goofy expres-

sion was only a front; underneath lurks steel.

Instant victory, instant euphoria. The crushing of a formidable, but generally disliked opponent, always brings applause from the galleries. But, has the opponent really been crushed? Or is he biding his time and regrouping his forces for a future engagement?

**D**espite what you see on Doordarshan and read in the papers, the deputy prime minister bitterly resisted the dismissal of his son to the very last. He might say that the resignation of Om Prakash has nothing to do with him, that it is a matter between the

son and the Janata Dal. Mr Chautala, on his part, might say that he is a 'disciplined soldier' and is stepping down on orders from the high command. All this is play-acting—and play-acting of a rather inferior order. The charade of Mr Devi Lal declaring on Doordarshan, "The party's decision (to ask for the resignation) is a good one," is nothing but humbug. And here television's inherent advantages over the print media become manifest: the transparent insincerity with which the patriarch uttered these words could not be concealed on camera.

In reality what has happened is that Mr Devi Lal, a seasoned

practitioner of realpolitik, has thought it fit to make a tactical retreat in the face of a campaign launched by the *Indian Express*. Make no mistake, Om Prakash Chautala's downfall was not obtained by V.P. Singh or Ajit Singh or Ramkrishna Hegde or Arun Nehru or Arif Mohammad Khan, but by the editor-in-chief of the *Indian Express*. It was Arun Shourie's front page eloquent and impassioned plea headed, 'Value-based silence' that gave new momentum to the Meham issue bogged down in wrangles over a judicial probe or CBI enquiry. Even the Congress, unsure of its tactics (whether to attack Devi Lal or to woo him), kept talking about 'the murder of democracy' rather than demanding the chief minister's head.

Arun Shourie's article, followed 24 hours later by Planning Commission member L.C. Jain's resignation, Rajmohan Gandhi's call for heeding moral values and Rajni Kothari's promise that Meham would not be forgotten by the Independent Initiative (in his article Shourie had repri-

## The PM's first blunder

*And it could well be a serious one*





manded all three gentlemen for remaining silent, so uncharitable observers could claim that the protests had been orchestrated), brought the government's prevarication on the Chautala issue into sharp focus. And I suspect that the Prime Minister at this stage decided he could risk taking Devi Lal head on. It is a decision that, I believe, Mr V.P. Singh will live to regret.

The *Indian Express's* clout in national affairs needs no amplification. No one, Indira, Rajiv, Sanjay, not even Dhirubhai Ambani, has succeeded in taming the paper. If you make an enemy of the *Express* you may as well bid farewell to your career. However, currently we have an extraordinary situation. The *Express* is going for the deputy prime minister of a government it passionately supports. The deputy prime minister (and his clan) is by common consensus a rather unsavoury character, but his following in the Janata Dal is considerable and his role in trouncing Rajiv's party in north India and getting V.P. Singh elected as leader of the parliamentary party is on record. The *Indian Express* is perfectly justified

in highlighting Devi Lal's numerous corruptions, and in that exercise, it is performing a salutary service. But, it seems of late that the *Express* versus Devi Lal battle has taken on a slightly personal note.

I dislike Mr Devi Lal as much as Arun Shourie does. If through some happy chance he could be whisked away to Outer Mongolia, all of us who wish this government well would breathe a sigh of relief. Alas, no such miracle can be relied upon. Mr Devi Lal is here to stay. Rajiv Gandhi had close to his bosom more corrupt ministers and chief ministers—J B. Patnaik, Jagannath Mishra and Bhajan Lal come instantly to mind. The National Front government must recognise that, at this critical juncture of its life, it has to carry Devi Lal along and use his dubious talents to strengthen and consolidate its base. However, to make an enemy of Devi Lal, to push

him into a corner from where he has no option but to fight back, to convince him that the party and the Prime Minister are out to crush him, is fraught with danger.

This is precisely what V.P. Singh has done. If I was in Devi Lal's *chappals*, I would be justified in concluding that the Prime Minister had collaborated with his number one foe, the *Indian Express*, to organise public protests against his son at a time when within the party and the government he had successfully managed to contain the crisis.

If Devi Lal had any doubts about who was responsible for the foul deed,

deft strategy or sensational exposure, but by allowing the MP from Ballia to discredit himself by his own actions. Something similar was happening to Devi Lal, and the process was identical. The deputy prime minister, aided and abetted by his kith and kin, was steadily discrediting himself. I am convinced that he would quickly have become a minor and manageable irritant, both in the party and in the government—someone to be dusted up and sent to China and Australia on useless missions.

What obtains now? We have a defeated and humiliated Devi Lal thirsting for revenge against V P

L.C. JAIN



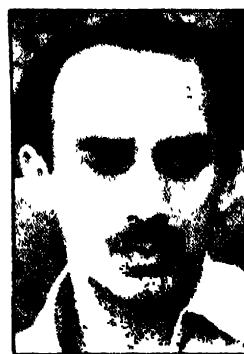
RAJNI KOTHARI



RAJMOHAN GANDHI



ARUN SHOURIE



**These four fine individuals who played such a vital role in effecting the overthrow of the Rajiv Gandhi regime might inadvertently cause the downfall of the National Front government**

they were set to rest by V P Singh's acolytes who told all and sundry that it was the Prime Minister, who in the Cabinet and the Political Affairs Committee of the Janata Dal, led the demand for the ouster of Chautala.

Am I suggesting that Meham should have been ignored on grounds of expediency? No, I am not. But consider what value-based politics has achieved. A Chautala man has been made the chief minister, and all the Cabinet members sworn in belong to his camp. Thus, even with a change in leadership, Devi Lal rules Haryana. And soon Chautala will be back, elected and cleansed from Darba Kalan. Instead of precipitating the crisis, the Prime Minister should have allowed the CBI, or instituted some other form of enquiry, to investigate the murder.

In the past couple of months V.P. Singh managed to neutralise Chandra Shekhar. He did this not through any

Singh. If, in order to settle scores, the government has to be brought down, Devi Lal will not be swayed by reasons of patriotism and sentiment. So, he will plot with Chandra Shekhar (thereby giving this spent force a new lease of life), he will plot with anti-V P Singh elements in the Janata Dal and the National Front, he will plot with Rajiv Gandhi, he will plot with industrialists.

As if he didn't have enough trouble on his hands, V P Singh has created a permanent and powerful dissident group led by the deputy prime minister at the heart of the party. Open sabotage will become commonplace now. Earlier, the best hope for the government was to survive, through a little compromise, a little accommodation, for 18 months to two years, and then to go to the country for a fresh mandate. With Devi Lal on the prowl, suddenly 18 months seems like a very long time. •



# Proprietors and editors

*Exploding the myth of 'press freedom'*



Even while chronicling American presidential politics through his highly readable, *Making Of The President* series, the late histo-

rian-journalist, Theodore H. White, produced a novel titled, *The View From The Fortieth Floor*. Supposed to be based on the closure of the *Life* magazine, the novel deals with the days of glory of a popular magazine and its decline and fall due to wrong policies and priorities. The editorial staff make several sacrifices, but cannot save the magazine.

The drama surrounding the 105-day closure of Bombay's much-loved *Indian Post*, if properly chronicled, would make fascinating reading. Tossed between the Singhanias (past owners) and the Shahs from Ahmedabad (present owners), the *Post*, thanks to its excellent editorial team, fought hard to survive. Loyal employees stayed on the premises and took on the dishonest management which went back on every promise it made. They organised rallies, held *dharnas*, braved the police *lathis*, roped in trade union and political leaders for support.

Chief minister Sharad Pawar pushed the management a bit and the paper resumed publication on 11 May. But it was the employees' show all the way. They persuaded the Atex computer system expert to stay on, pleaded with the wire services to resume operations, got Voltas Ltd to start the airconditioning and even paid from their own pockets for chemicals, bromides and other items. Proprietor Shreyans Shah made occasional guest appearances, promised this and that, disappeared to Ahmedabad (where he brings out the highly successful *Gujarat Samachar* publications), and re-emerged in Bombay only to deny the earlier promises.

The battle for *The Indian Post* is going on grimly. Several journalists had quit during the last three and a half months. Shah promised the staff salaries for April, then refused and finally made advance payments for

May. The disgusted employees struck back, bringing out eight-page editions. With only a skeleton staff to run the paper, the pages of *Indian Post* are full of agency items including Soviet hand-outs. Former owners the Singhanias, have agreed to let the paper come out of its present premises till 30 June. What happens afterwards, only time and Shreyans Shah can tell.

Yet, it would not surprise me if Shreyans Shah is honoured as a champion of press freedom by some western agencies. And why not? Shah is doing to *The Indian Post* only what C R Irani has been doing to *The Statesman* for several years. And look at the bags full of medals that Irani has acquired for saving press freedom in India!

The recent complaint to the Press Council by *The Statesman*, New Delhi editor, M L Kotru, against managing director-managing editor rolled into one, Irani, does not shock those who had been witnessing the goings-on in the paper for several years. Irani, quite frankly told Kotru, "How does it matter if I'm the managing director or the managing editor? I decide the policies of this newspaper. The Calcutta editor knows this and you better know it too."



What does N. Ram, personally honoured with *The Statesman* medal for press freedom by Irani, feel about all this? Would he return the medal?

You can also bet that organisations like the Editors Guild will pretend that *The Statesman* scandal does not exist at all. Did the Guild make any noises when Biju Patnaik's *badla* brigades raided the premises of *Samband* and *The Sun Times* owned by the J.B. Patnaik family? J.B. Patnaik may not be everyone's cup of tea, but compare this studied silence with the furore raised when income tax officials raided the offices of the *Indian Express* during the Congress regime! And can anyone deny that the Sethji is a cleverer manipulator than poor JBP?

Unfortunately, press freedom has come to be associated with attacks on one leader, one family, one party. Going by the writings of most of our senior columnists, it would appear, it is Rajiv Gandhi who is still in power. Writing in a recent issue of *The Telegraph* the Padma Vibhushan-declining columnist, every word dripping with venom, blasted Gandhi for not holding organisational elections in his party. But not one word on the more recent farce that was the Janata Dal 'election' of its interim party president with Prime Minister V.P. Singh once again failing to assert himself. If this is the value-based politics he propagates, the columnist is fully entitled to the 'Journalist of the Year' award from the *Current* magazine. The award, the recipient and the publication are all made for each other!

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Sharad Pawar pushed the cause of *The Indian Post* and helped it resume publication







C.R. Irani (left) honoured N. Ram with *The Statesman* medal for 'press freedom'

a much-needed sports editor, I hope the paper does not do away with the services of Mr Arvind Lavkare. His column on the sports page was always incisive, knowledgeable and fair. We do not have many columnists of his calibre, people who are more interested in the game than those who play it, and it would be a pity if there is any change. Lavkare's column has not been appearing for the last three weeks and I hope it's only a temporary absence.

## In apartheid country

Several years ago, as a reporter for *The Times of India* in Ahmedabad, I first met Aswini Sarin of the *Indian Express*. Obviously he did not like the city, missed New Delhi from where he had come, and managed to get back to the capital. Soon, he made news, with his expose of the conditions in the Tihar jail and the Kamala episode where he purchased an Adivasi girl to highlight the poverty in the tribal areas.

The first Indian journalist to tour South Africa, Sarin recently wrote a series of interesting articles on his experiences in the apartheid land. And it was quite a revelation! Despite the release of Nelson Mandela and lifting of the ban on the African National Congress, nothing much has changed.

Sarin spent 15 hours at Johannesburg's Jan Smuts airport because of visa problems. Once in the city, he learnt that Whites travelled in cabs driven by White cabbies, Blacks by other Blacks. He was advised not to attend press conferences or functions organised by White extremists. "In South Africa, blood is not red. It is white, black, Indian and coloured," he was told. Violence is very much in the air, murders have risen 100 per cent since 1987 and nearly half of the three million firearms registered in the country belong to the six million White population. While Indians are doing well in trade and commerce, they too have to suffer humiliation. In Durban, Indians are not served at fast food chains during weekends and are

denied entry at posh restaurants. While watching a rugby match, Sarin and his friend, Steve Naidoo, were asked by a White, "What you guys doings here? This is no coolie game." Indians are still referred to as coolies!

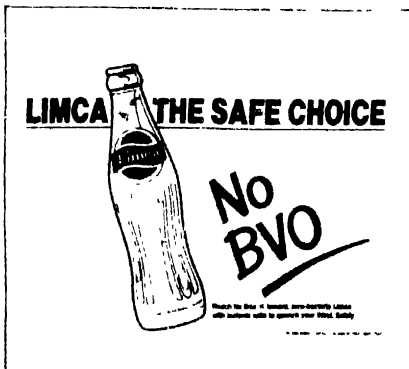
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## Do new brooms sweep clean?

We are familiar with the 'winds of change' whenever a new government takes over. Heads of corporations are changed, bureaucrats transferred with the favourites brought closer to the centres of power and those not in favour posted to Meghalaya or the Andamans.

Should a newspaper also follow the same strategy when a new team takes over? Should it dispense with the existing columnists, critics and writers who do have a reputation? While welcoming the new, energetic team at *The Sunday Observer*, which includes a

**The new Limca ad: increasing consumer consciousness**



I must also congratulate Mr I K Jagirdar, editor of the Kannada magazine, *Sanket*, for moving a public interest petition against the Karnataka government for extending hospitality to former President Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy by accommodating him at a Bangalore government guest house, providing him with cars and servants and running up a bill of Rs 54 lakhs in 22 months. The largesse was sanctioned by former chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde. The petitioner has mentioned that Mr Reddy is financially well placed and is capable of maintaining himself and his family to suit his status.

Former Presidents are justified if they demand a hike in their pensions (at present Rs 2,500 a month) but to live as parasite off a friendly state government is a bit too much. Mr Jagirdar has admirably fulfilled the role of a watchdog.

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## Pay your own way

An encouraging development in the media is the increasing coverage of consumer interests. No, not the vague editorials or write-ups by so-called experts, but reporting of hard facts. The Calcutta-based Consumer Unity and Trust Society's campaign against the soft drinks containing the banned chemical brominated vegetable oil (BVO) and its substitute, estergum, is also being covered well. This is a welcome change considering that the soft drinks firms are heavy advertisers. •

*The views expressed in this column are that of its author and not those of SUNDAY*



# Tiger tale

*Despite losing the Assembly elections, the Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray is still a force to reckon with in Maharashtra*



GAUTAM PATOLE

In 1967, long before Sharad Pawar became a minister and when Maharashtra politics was dominated by the likes of V.P. Naik and Y.B. Chavan, Bal Thackeray was already a power to reckon with. That year, his Shiv Sena targeted V.K. Krishna Menon, a former defence minister, who was fighting to defend his North Bombay seat at the Lok Sabha election. Menon lost—contrary to all expectations—and Thackeray treated it as his own victory.

Twenty-three years later, Naik, Chavan and Menon are all dead. Sharad Pawar, who was not even an MLA in those days, is Maharashtra's unchallenged boss and Bal Thackeray is still around.

His Shiv Sena has abandoned its early support for Maharashtra chauvinism and has stopped regarding all Gujaratis and south Indians as its enemies (In fact, Chandrika Kenia, a former Gujarati defector from the Congress, is a Shiv Sena MP in the Rajya Sabha). Now, the accent is on Hindutva and the attack is on secularism.

In the elections to the Maharashtra Assembly held earlier this year, the Sena allied with the BJP and was widely expected to seize power. It failed narrowly to obtain a majority and chief minister Sharad Pawar's minority Congress Legislature Party remained in office with the support of Independents.

At one level, it was an astonishing performance. That Thackeray, who had once been regarded as a passing phenomenon, should come so close to becoming the chief minister demonstrated that he had staying power. But at another level, it was a bitter disappointment. Thackeray had been so cocky before the elections that his alliance's defeat was seen as a personal humiliation.

Certainly, he regarded it as such. Shortly after the election, he ended up in the intensive care unit of the Hinduja Hospital and was said to have suffered a heart attack. (He denies this—see interview.) After he recovered, he turned on his senior aides and accused them of misleading him. And now, he seethes at his bungalow in the artists' colony of Kalanagar, desperately thinking up ways to oust Pawar.

Despite the bravado, he has lost his old fire, though, fortunately, he retains the ironic humour that once made him one of Bombay's top cartoonists.



Perhaps if he had stuck to cartooning, he might have been as successful as R.K. Laxman, who had also joined the *Free Press Journal*. But Thackeray was given a seat near the telephone operator and the persistent ringing got on his nerves. What made matters worse was the overbearing attitude of his boss, A.B. Nayar. Finally, Thackeray just stormed out one day.

Then, he founded *Marmik* (Main Point), a Marathi periodical on 13 August, 1960. There, he ran a column that was openly communal, fiery and dangerous. Thackeray, the rabble-rouser, was thus born. Soon, the column began giving details of the number of jobs in prestigious business and industrial establishments in Bombay held by non-Maharashtrians.

Bal's father, Prabodhankar Thackeray, who was one of the activists of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement that had fought for statehood, was thrilled when his son decided to form an organisation that would stand up for the rights of Maharashtrians. When Prabodhankar suggested the name 'Shiv Sena' his son 'roared' his approval and the snarling tiger became the organisation's symbol. The first ever public meeting was held at Shivaji Park in Bombay and Thackeray was overjoyed when more than 50,000 young people turned up.

Overnight, Thackeray became a messiah for the Maharashtrians. "Maharashtrians would now claim priority in education, employment, food and housing over all others who flock to this city," declared the Shiv Sena manifesto. The Tigers were against all non-Maharashtrians, especially the 'loongiwallas' who came from the south. With the Maratha warrior king, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, as a role model, Bal Thackeray began his attempts to "free Maharashtra". His belief in "controlled violence" was bound to lead to bloodshed and the Maharashtrians, swayed by Thackeray's powerful oratory skills, began their battle for "Maharashtra for Maharashtrians". The Tigers took to the streets and many a south Indian's loongi was ripped off on the road.

In the meantime, though Thackeray



GAJAN PATIL

**Bal Thackeray with the BJP's L.K. Advani: the alliance failed to seize power**

continued with his fiery speeches. he realised that real power lay in trade unionism. In 1968, Thackeray, now immensely popular with thousands of Maharashtrians, formed the Bharatiya Kamgar Sena (BKS) and, predictably, tried to muscle in on Dr Datta Samant's territory. By 1973, the BKS had emerged as a force to reckon with. It wangled successfully with the management for workers' rights—the Larsen & Toubro's wage hike is one of its major successes. By then, Bal Thackeray was king of all he surveyed.

Politically, Thackeray's clout grew, thanks to his mentors in the Congress. On 13 August, 1960, Yashwantrao Chavan, the then Congress(I) chief minister and an open sympathiser of the Sena, had inaugurated *Marmik* and talked of the Sena in glowing terms. But by 1965, the left was manoeuvring itself into a position of prominence. The Congress, trying to cash in on the Maharashtra's feeling that they were under-represented, set up the Shiv Sena as a 'front

organisation'. It started using the Sena to fight 'the communist menace' and break the back of leftist trade unions. Just two years after it was founded, the Sena contested the civic elections in Bombay and managed to win 40 of the 140 seats with the support of the Congress. It was a tremendous beginning for an organisation whose members were considered hoodlums by a lot of people. Bal Thackeray was sitting pretty, with a photograph of Adolf Hitler on his desk, and he conducted his business with whip-lash directives that would have made the Great Dictator proud.

In the 1967 general elections, political observers noted that the city's 'boss', S.K. Patil, had lost his hold on the populace and the then chief minister V.P. Naik's popularity was plunging. The Shiv Sena rushed to fill the political vacuum. It brainwashed the Maharashtrians of North Bombay into believing that the Congress' Krishna Menon would do nothing for them because he was an outsider. The strategy worked, and the Sena's influence grew.

Meanwhile, the Congress continued to nurture the Shiv Sena. In 1974, the Sena supported the Congress' Ramrao Adik for a Lok Sabha byelection in Bombay. (However, Adik lost.)

**Sharad Pawar: still Maharashtra's boss**





When the Emergency was declared in 1975, Bal Thackeray, rumours have it, was terrified of 'the Durga'—Indira Gandhi—so he kept his mouth shut and maintained a low profile. Still, the Shiv Sena stood by the Congress(I).

The honeymoon between the Congress(I) and the Sena persisted till the 1977 Lok Sabha polls. However, when the Congress lost, Thackeray decided to go it alone. He had already proved that he could wean away Maharashtra workers from leftist unions by providing a platform based on ethnicity rather than ideology. This decision, of course, led to violence. But that didn't bother Thackeray.

**T**he organisational structure of the Shiv Sena runs almost parallel to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), founded by Dr Baliram Hegdegar in 1923. But Thackeray insists that he based his party's manifesto on the preachings of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy of West Bengal. Forming a linguistic state in 1948, Roy declared that Bengalis would be given first preference and 'outsiders' would have to wait. Industrialists who did not follow this policy of recruitment would not be granted land.

But between Thackeray and Roy, there exists a huge gulf. Thackeray is much more militant than Roy ever was and the Shiv Sena leader firmly believes that "sometimes it is better to throw a few stones" to get one's way. This has often led to violence and bloodshed. His *sainiks* have often been referred to as goons, thugs and

hoodlums. But these tags have never worried Thackeray.

In 1969, the Shiv Sena was directly involved in ten days of bloody communal carnage. It was only after the army moved in that things returned to normal. In 1971, blood was shed again when Bal Thackeray visited Kausa. While he was there, there were strong rumours that he was going to be killed by the Muslims. In an hour's time, the Sena put together a task force in Bombay and rushed it to Kausa to protect its leader. Predictably, a confrontation between two communities followed.

In May 1984, the Sena was again involved in the Bhiwandi communal riots, which left 275 people dead. Other riots followed as the Sena sought to establish itself. Panvel,

**SUNDAY:** Many people feel that you suffered a heart attack because the Shiv Sena didn't do too well in the Assembly elections...

**Bal Thackeray:** Let me make this clear: it was not a heart attack. It was angina pains and, yes, it could have led to an attack but was checked in time. Regarding the Sena's performance in the elections, we lost only because the party was short of funds. The Janata Dal took money from the blackmarketeers, smugglers and criminals. And all the while my people were roaming on the streets with saffron flags.

**Q:** What were the other reasons behind the Sena's poor performance?

**A:** We failed to register most of the 18-year-old youths. Otherwise, it was a sure win for us. The senior members of my party fooled me. I have been cheated by my own people. By keeping me in the dark and painting a rosy picture they thought that they would fool me. But now I am in the process of revamping the party.

**Q:** You have been meeting the chief of your

## "I am a dictator"

*Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray in an introspective mood*

party unit from Jammu and Kashmir. What is your strategy in the troubled state?

**A:** Right now, we are helping the people with food and medicines. For countering the terrorists, I have proposed a bullet for a bullet strategy. There should be no trial of the terrorists—just shoot them dead. They are all traitors.

**Q:** Do you think that V.P. Singh will be able to work out a solution?

**A:** (Laughs) Don't forget that V.P. Singh is a Congressman at heart. Before the elections, people said, "Give him a chance, give him a long rope..." But for what? To hang all the Hindus? Take the other joker, Farooq Abdullah. That man is a dandy. When Kashmir was burning, he was having a good time in some five-star hotel.

**Q:** Considering that the Congress initially helped the Shiv Sena, why have you suddenly turned against the party?

**A:** Look what they have done to the country. They have ruined it. People call me a Hindu fanatic but I do have a religion. But not...





Nasik, Aurangabad, Nanded, Amravati...the list of places which witnessed bloodshed is long. People started referring to the Shiv Sena as the 'riot squad'.

But Thackeray's power was increasing. By 1988, he boasted of having *shakhas* in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka as well as in 10,000 of Maharashtra's 35,000 villages. "The country belongs to me and I belong to the country," he thundered and Maharashtrians applauded.

In March 1988, the Shiv Sena captured the Aurangabad municipal corporation. This was yet another feather in Thackeray's cap after his party's 1985 victory in the Bombay Municipal Corporation election. But Thack-

er the Nehru *gharana* nor the Indira *gharana* had any religion. Both the leaders said a lot about India and Hinduism but all the while they were milking the country dry. Today, V.P. Singh is doing just the same.

**Q: What are you doing to rejuvenate the Shiv Sena?**

**A:** I am certainly not sitting idle. I am working out strategies to topple the Sharad Pawar government.

**Q: But what will be your strategy?**

**A:** I am not going to disclose that. One is not supposed to reveal one's tactics to the enemy. But I promise you that this time Pawar will find it difficult to survive.

**Q: Before the Assembly elections you were talking about ruling Maharashtra. But nothing of the sort happened. Did the poll results embarrass you considerably?**

**A:** Certainly not. I am above embarrassment. If we could elicit the support of the youths, we could have won. The people of Maharashtra still want me.

**Q: There seems to be a lot of infighting and disillusionment within the ranks of the Shiv Sena...**

**A:** There is no such problem. I am a dictator and whatever decision I take is carried out by the party.

**Q: How can you have a heart problem, will you change your lifestyle?**

**A:** Well, from now on I have to be very careful. I have to give up smoking and I will really miss my pipe. I have also stopped drinking.



**"I am certainly not sitting idle. I am working out strategies to topple the Sharad Pawar government in Maharashtra," says Thackeray**

eray's move to change the name of Aurangabad to Sambaji Nagar did not work out, just as a previous attempt to rename Bombay as Mumbai was unsuccessful.

**A**s the years passed and the Sena rode the crest of the popularity wave despite an occasional setback, Thackeray set his sights on ruling Maharashtra. In February 1990, as an electorate of more than 4.81 crores went to the ninth Assembly polls, the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine was supposed to ensure an embarrassing defeat for the Congress(I) and chief minister Sharad Pawar. Thackeray was confident.

But when the election results began pouring in, Thackeray's hopes crashed. In the 288-member Assembly, the Congress(I) secured 142 seats and the backing of ten Independents. The Sena won only 51 seats and the BJP 42. Pawar retained power and Thackeray retreated heart-broken.

In early March, Bal Thackeray suffered an alleged heart attack. He was rushed to the Hinduja Hospital, where he was declared out of danger after a week. The stress and strain of campaigning on the road and the crushing

defeat at the hustings had taken their toll. It all proved too much for the 64-year-old Sena leader.

Today, he is taking things easy at his residence at Matrchaya in Bandra East. He sits with the help of a backrest and carries Sorbitrate (heart pills) in his pocket. The enormous amount of weight he has lost makes him seem like a caricature of his old self. He is still bitter about his defeat at the polls and, even now, plots and plans to overthrow Sharad Pawar. But somehow, his heart is not in it any longer.

People still flock to see him, but the numbers have lessened—not because his popularity has waned, but because he cannot stand the strain. At the first twinge of discomfort, Thackeray slips a Sorbitrate under his tongue, leans back in his chair and closes his eyes.

Next year, the Shiv Sena will celebrate 25 years of its existence, but Bal Thackeray's dreams of power have yet to be fulfilled. However, he refuses to give up. He declares that all's well with his party and there is no infighting or rivalry. One day, he swears, the saffron flag will reign supreme in Maharashtra. Till then, he sits and dreams. •

**Godfrey Pereira/Bombay**



# Red star over Assam

*Is the ULFA a Maoist organisation?*

**T**he rising sun is the symbol of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), but it may well have been the hammer and the sickle. The ULFA, which has raised the demand of Assam's secession from the Indian Union and has taken to the path of insurgency in the verdant Brahmaputra valley, appears to be guided by Maoist ideology in its fight against Indian 'colonialism'.

The police and political parties have tried to berate the ULFA as a terrorist outfit bereft of any ideology. But an analysis of its operations suggests that the ULFA—like the Naxalites—has adopted Maoist tactics that could transform its insidious activities into full-scale insurgency.

In the beginning, the ULFA, which was formed in April 1979, was solely inspired by a sense of chauvinism and served as the militant wing of the Assam movement. Its ire was directed against the state's Bengali population in the name of driving away illegal migrants, who have been streaming into Assam from across the border in Bangladesh. But, according to political analysts in Guwahati, the ULFA began changing its political tack after Arabind alias Rajiv Rajkhowa became its

chairman towards the end of 1984.

Significantly, the Assam movement had, by then, run out of steam and the former Congress(I) chief minister, Hiteswar Saikia, who came to power after the controversial Assembly elections of 1983, seemed to be in complete command. The jingoism that marked the agitation had lost much of its appeal and the leaders of the ULFA—like those of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) who led the Assam movement—were gasping for a new lease of life. While the AASU and the AAGSP leaders returned to main-

stream politics after the Assam accord, the ULFA spurned the olive branch.

Rajkhowa, who, according to sources in Guwahati, was closely associated with the Naxalite faction led by Vinode Mishra, decided to blend Maoism with Assamese sub-nationalism. With Rajkhowa at the helm, the ULFA's political formulations changed palpably. It discarded the AASU's thesis that the illegal migrants and the state's sizeable Bengali population were at the root of Assam's problems. It began saying that Indian capitalists and politicians exploited the state in a "colonial" style and identified them as the real enemies of the Assamese people. And, in

nious offences, the imposition of 'taxes' on the rich; and the eradication of social evils like alcoholism, gambling, screening of blue films in video parlours, drug trafficking and the abuse of women.

It appears from these measures that the ULFA has based its activities on Mao Zedong's famous Hunan Report, in which the great helmsman of China had stressed all the points that today form the salient features of the ULFA's strategy for winning mass support. Even the ULFA's extortionist ways seem to find theoretical endorsement in Mao's report in which he had advocated the imposition of fines and taxes on rich and tyrannical landlords as a step towards establishing

people's power. According to a source close to the ULFA, its activists are looking towards China for ideological sustenance, if not material support. "Maoist literature is in great demand. The ULFA boys are avidly reading the works of Mao Zedong," he revealed.

It is little wonder then that the CPI(ML) views the ULFA as a progressive organisation, though it is critical of its secessionist obsession. In a recent statement issued by the CPI(ML)'s Assam state committee, the party has said "The

CPI(ML), *Liberation* group, welcomes the ULFA's efforts to bring about revolutionary changes in Assam by making great sacrifices, putting up with immense hardships and releasing the positive forces inherent in youth power."

Obviously, the Naxalites are trying to woo the ULFA in order to put up a joint fight against a common enemy: the Indian government. If the Naxalites do succeed in winning over the ULFA, it would certainly compound the government's problems. But it could also mean the end of secessionism—at least for the time being. ●

**Anish Gupta/Guwahati**



**ULFA activists: looking towards China?**

an equally significant turn of phrase, the ULFA stopped referring to the inhabitants of Assam as Assamese, instead, it began calling them the "people of Assam".

All political parties in the state admit that the ULFA has become popular in the rural areas. They concede that the ULFA's "populist" developmental programmes and social reform measures have helped the secessionists carve out their areas of influence. The most talked-about steps taken by the organisation are the building of roads, bridges and dykes, the holding of public trials and punishing people for minor and se-



# More smoke than fire

*The Naxalite menace and not environmental problems—threatens Kanha*



**T**his time Kanha hit the headlines not as the 'best maintained game reserve in Asia' but as the most endangered. Almost half of the forest cover was reported to have been burnt to the ground by Naxalites. The main facts are true enough—there are Naxalites, extensive tracts have caught fire and Kanha is indeed endangered. But the links have been mixed up. The police insist that Naxalites did not cause the fire and the forest authorities affirm that the damage caused was not extensive. And Kanha national park's endangered status is obvious from the about 700 policemen and commandos patrolling it, but not for environmental reasons.

Stretching over the districts of Mandla and Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, this national park is the most successful tiger project in India. Despite its 97 tigers, 62 panthers, thousands of cheetah, sambhar and barking deer, its star attraction today is the rare 12-point *barasingha* (swamp deer). In 1970, there were only 66 *barasinghas* in Kanha. Under the added protection of Project Tiger, the species nearing extinction now numbers 540 in the national park. This deer sheds its magnificent antlers after the mating

season, and the local tribals collect them to sell for a mere Rs 50. According to the police, forest authorities and local government, this practice caused the much-publicised fire this year—not the Naxalites.

As it is, summer fires are common in the dry heat of the Dandakaranya forests, of which Kanha is a part. Also, forest officials practise controlled and rotational burning to encourage the growth of new grass, mainly in the patches of meadow where the deer graze. And, finally, the tribals set fire to the undergrowth to clear the ground, which makes it easier to hunt for the shed *barasingha* antlers. There are cases of fire every year, all over the Dandakaranya, only this year it is widespread in the show-piece park.

Today, the issue is not just ecological. '*Rajnautik aag jyada lagi hay, vastavik aag se*,' says Thaneswar Misra, a local BJP leader. Motilal Vora, the Congress(I) ex-chief minister of MP, claims 40 per cent of forest cover has been destroyed, while the ruling BJP stridently pushes a conservative ten per cent. The Congress(I)'s spiel seems to be that the new government has proved totally incapable of controlling the Naxalite menace. "If there is any Naxalite problem here, it is

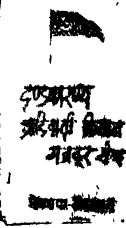
**A ravaged tree-trunk: the fire still smoulders**

because of the Congress(I)," retorts Misra. "They allowed them to enter and now we have to deal with them." M.R. Sahasrabudhe, a BJP activist from Jabalpur, shares his opinion.

The deputy collector of Mandla, J.P. Tiwari, sticks to the ten per cent figure too. "If you take green trees," he adds, "the damage is negligible." And the police agree. "The damage to green trees is less than two per cent." But why such a hullabaloo over the fire in Kanha, then?

There is a misunderstanding, it seems. "As per ocular survey, the ground fire takes up 45-50 per cent of the forest area," says a top forest official, requesting anonymity. And the damage is not extensive, since this is not a crown fire. Grasslands and

shrubs have been affected, not full-grown trees. However, there might be some trouble with the grazing ground of the deer. But then, when one area is affected, the deer inevitably move to another.





"Of almost 280 fire sites," adds the forest official, "only in one, in Orai, has a Naxalite been seen lighting it." Locals believe that the extremists are not really causing the fire. But they may be encouraging it. The direct cause is the Baiga tribals—who have two main motives. First, to collect *barasingha* antlers. Second, to distract forest authorities so that they can plunder forest produce, especially bamboo, in peace, somewhere else. A third, less immediate, reason is what the local administration calls the 'revenge motive'. Exploited, cheated and sick of bribing forest guards, these tribals give vent to their anger by creating trouble for the forest authorities.

**T**he part the Naxalites play in all this is interesting. Terrified of them, the forest authorities do not venture into the interiors very much; thus the Baigas get a free hand and the fire spreads. "We have caught eight Baigas recently," says a police official, "and the situation is under control." But it is quite impossible to keep the tribals out, says the forest department,

although 26 of the 44 villages in the national park have been relocated outside the park.

To counter tribal resentment, chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa has promised to change the forest policy, allowing the tribals more right over the forest. This decision speaks of the importance the government is paying to the present situation. It has ample reason to. For the media spotlight has unwittingly identified the real problem—Kanha may become the next Naxalite stronghold. Finally, the dense jungle of Kanha could become the centre for all sorts of extremists.

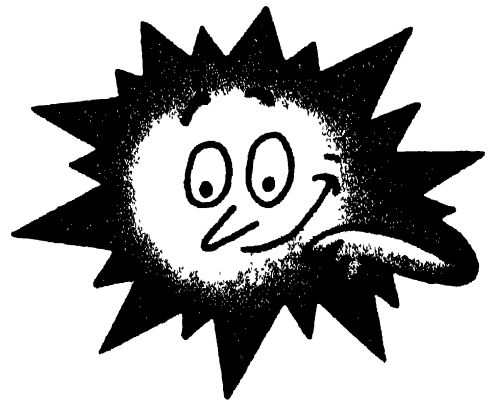
"Naxalite activity in Kanha is in its first stage," says M.S. Gupta, the superintendent of police (SP), Mandla. "The extremists are still talking ideology and promising better wages and standards of living to the exploited tribals. That ideology can be quite attractive—but they won't stick to it."

In fact, almost all agree that the Naxalites got in on the socio-economic ticket. In a region with failed development programmes and rampant corruption, the men of the greenwood are always welcome. Kanha, till now, is



**Special Task Force personnel in Kanha: safeguarding the tourist hot spot**

Bastar all over again. The Naxalites have again launched an awareness programme among the Adivasis, teaching them their economic and so-



**Does Your Car  
Look As Good After  
THE SUMMER ?**





cial points out, there has been no recent complaint of corruption in the national park itself. "Why here?" he asks. "If fighting exploitation is the true reason, then Kanha is not the ideal battleground. Why not go and fight where it is needed most?" Simply because the thick forest criss-crossed with ditches and ravines offers the best cover.

With many tribal cadres who know the area and are at home in the jungle ("vari ke bandar" the police call them in utter frustration), the Naxalites have the makings of a formidable guerrilla force. To combat it, forest guards and police have been patrolling jointly since 30 April. But it is a lame-leading-the-blind situation: the police have no topographical knowledge and the forest officials are totally demoralised by the incidents of assault on forest guards.

Besides, the police are not properly equipped for a jungle war, with at most SLRs against the extremists' AK-47s and other sophisticated weaponry. The Naxalites being active mostly at night, the police need infra-red night vision devices, Very pistols

to serve as torches and fire extinguishers to check the damage done by rifle-grenades. Despite their handicap, the police took first blood. In their first encounter with the Naxalites, on 8 January at Murkutta, Balaghat, 56 rounds were fired in the exchange. Though the extremists managed to escape, one was wounded. A first-aid kit, some party literature, cartridges, a 12-bore rifle and a country-made gun were recovered.

Since the first assault on a forest guard at Ajanpur, Balaghat, on 24 March, forest authorities have demanded better security. Subsequently, another forest employee was roughed up in Sulsuli, also in Balaghat. What was strange, however, was the assault on a villager in Sautia, Mandla. Rao Singh, a tribal, fell victim to the Naxalites' wrath on 6 May "The 'National Party' (the tribals' way of pronouncing Naxalites) first asked me my name and whether I was a *chowkidaar*," recalls Singh. "Then they asked me where the source of water was. I said I didn't know and they beat me up." Probably that was just a show of power, the stick that goes with the carrot

cial rights. Not pedagogues alone, they are also projecting themselves as the protectors of the oppressed by terrorising forest officials. Already called 'Dada' by the villagers, they could soon be lords of the jungle.

However, as a senior forest offi



# Does Your Car Look As Good After THE MONSOON ?



Interestingly, the police have adopted a novel approach here "Whoever may have created the situation, it is our men who ultimately face the bullets," says SP M.S. Gupta. So they have decided to strike at the root—corruption, which leads to severe tribal exploitation and strengthens the image of the Naxalite as protector. The police, usually notorious for inaction even as reported cases pile up, have here become the paragons of justice. They investigate

very little trouble in uniting wage labourers and absorbing tribals into the fold.

The connection is made earlier—when the tribals go to work in bamboo plantations in Chandrapur, Maharashtra. Originally from Adilabad, Andhra Pradesh, the extremists have skirted the border to Chandrapur. From there, one group has passed through Warora and Bhandra to enter MP, pass through Balaghat into the park and cross over to Mandla, while another has come via Garhchiroli, along the MP-Maharashtra border, into Rajnandgaon. The Naxalites at Kanha are supposedly funded by the paper mills and *tendu* merchants of AP and Maharashtra.

The two bands now in Kanha are powerfully backed. But the operation is still young—the 14 men and six women have to shed their olive green and camouflage fatigues in daylight. Yet, to fight that handful, the state government has involved the Special

Branch (SB) and moved in around 700 police and commandos.

"We have our plans," says an SB official, flipping through hand-drawn maps of Kanha. "We have plotted alternative routes—both foot-tracks and jeep roads—and are prepared for them." But till now only one Naxalite has been caught. However, the police and intelligence refuse to confirm this.

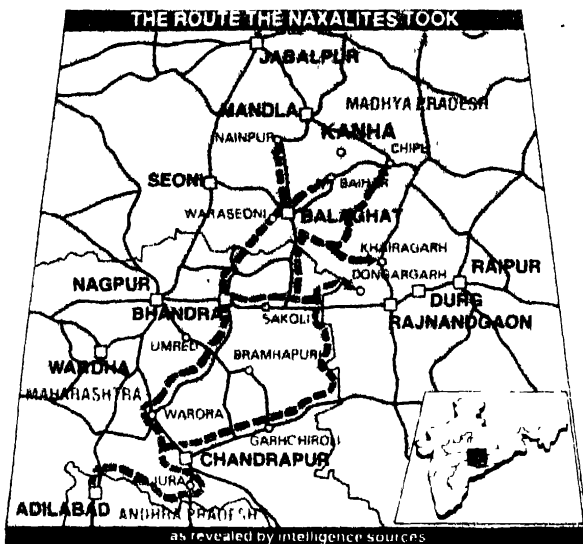
Kanha's strategic importance seems to be the reason for such concern. At present, it is the site of an Indo-American project for developing visitor-education programmes and is to become a training centre for the staff of other national parks. Famous as the best game reserve in Asia, Kanha is a favourite with foreign tourists—whose kidnapping or murder could severely strain international relations.

An added problem is the presence of various voluntary organisations, some strengthened by foreign funds, any of which can act as a front for extremists. In fact, the Prayog Samaj Sevi Samstha of Raipur seems to have taken up the role already. The organisation has various publications, such as *Pukar*, *Prayog*, *Navrachna* and *Ankur*, which overtly sympathise with the Naxalites, who, in turn, actually distribute Prayog's literature. It is suspected that another non-governmental organisation, the Navrachna Samiti, is also a Naxalite front.

From the environmental point of view, probably the presence of such huge police forces is causing more damage than the fire that grabbed the headlines. The police compete with villagers for scarce drinking water. Also, their presence restricts the mobility of the tribals. Earlier, in Bastar, especially in the Indravati Abhayaranya, the police carried out frequent raids, terrorised villagers, destroyed property, brutalised in the name of interrogation, demanded bribes, illegally detained people and clapped just anybody in jail.

Hopefully, this will not happen in Kanha. Especially since there has been a lot of noise recently about Naxalites fighting corruption in Andhra, Maharashtra and other parts of MP. But, the condescending attitude that urban elites have towards tribals might make it easy for the police to turn oppressor. That will only help strengthen the grounds for extremism. And with the tourist hot spot in their hands, the extremists might hold the country to ransom. ●

**Antara Dev Sen/Kanha**



possible cases of exploitation of their own accord. Recently, a supervising committee was set up by the collectorate at Mandla to curb further corruption. But tree-felling, trading in illicit timber and cheating tribals of their wages and foodgrain supplies are common features of the local economy. Last month, the police arrested some forest officials in the reserve forest bordering Kanha. A few of them have been suspended and one jailed. A couple of officials have taken anticipatory bail.

On the other hand, tribal development projects mostly consist of plans like installing solar lamps that don't work, schools with no teachers and scholarships that tribals haven't heard of. The officials in charge of their welfare do not understand their language, needs or way of life. Compared to them, the Naxalites, quite often tribals themselves, are closer home, not the 'aliens from Andhra Pradesh' the government makes them out to be. Consequently, organisations like the Dandakaranya Kisan Mazdoor Sangha, taken to be a front for the Naxalites (People's War Group), have

**Rao Singh, the first non-forester to be assaulted by Naxalites: a victim of muscle-flexing?**



PHOTOGRAPHS PRADIP SAHA



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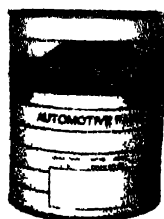
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# The spirit of 1979

*As the cracks become apparent, doubts are raised about the government's ability to last its term*

**T**here were uncomfortable parallels with the 1977-79 Janata government. Then, Prime Minister Morarji Desai had been forced by public opinion to act against home minister Charan Singh. While Desai's initiative had met with widespread acclaim, it had ultimately sown the seeds for his government's downfall. Charan Singh had seethed silently and, finally, brought the ministry down.

This time, V.P. Singh was playing the Morarji Desai role and Charan

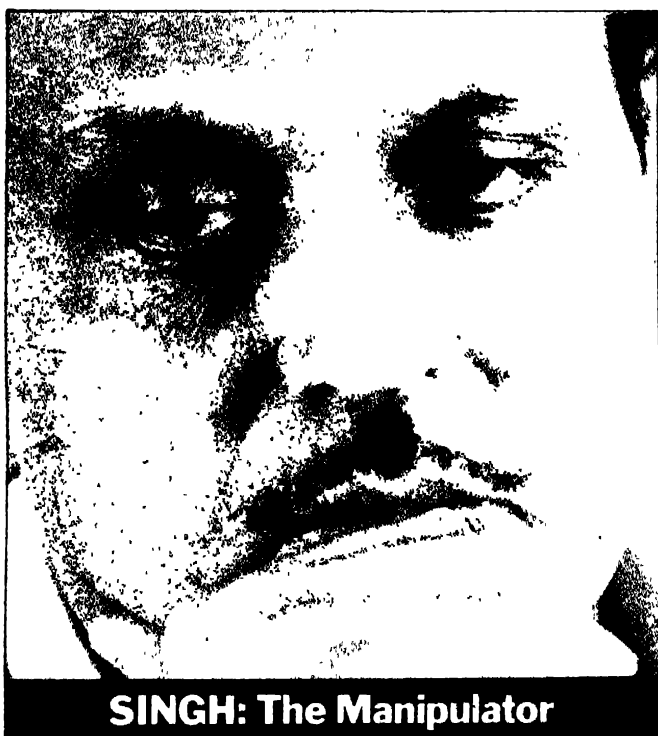
Singh's protégé Devi Lal was cast as his mentor. Chandra Shekhar was common to both scenarios. Then, he had been on the Prime Minister's side urging Morarji to keep Charan Singh in check but to do so without humiliating him. Now, he was in Devi Lal's camp, commiserating with him and plotting the collapse of V.P. Singh's ministry.

If the parallels caused a palpable sense of unease in the Janata Dal, there was, at least, the consolation that a public relations victory had

been achieved and that the Prime Minister's halo of moral uprightness was intact.

For a day or two, it had seemed as though the Opposition, led by a newly-resurgent Congress(I), had got the government on the run. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had, at last, emerged from his slumber and had caused V.P. Singh to lose his composure in the Lok Sabha.

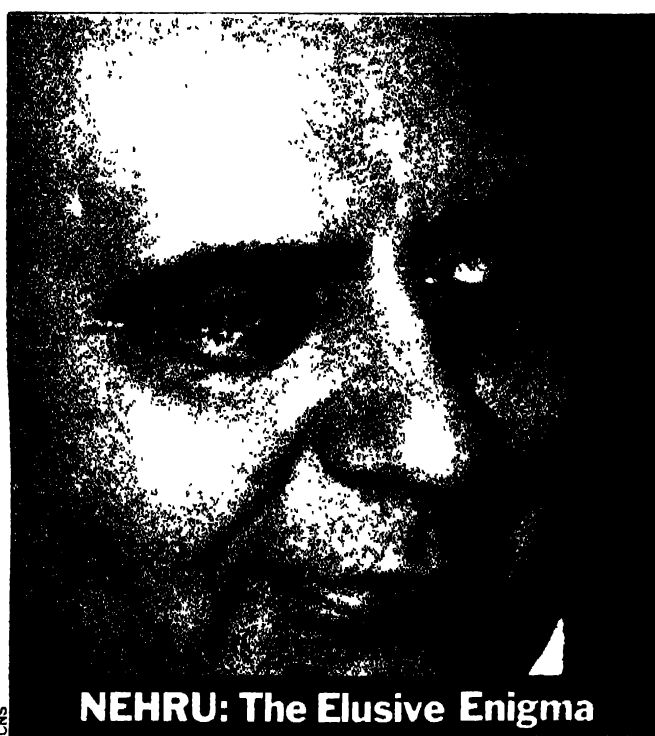
The key to the problem was, as usual, deputy prime minister Devi Lal. Ever since the Election Commis-



**SINGH: The Manipulator**

The Raja has few supporters of his own in the Cabinet and can only rely on George Fernandes, Raja Ramanna, M G K. Menon, etc. He has survived by adroitly managing the other groups in the Cabinet

Whatever Devi Lal or Chandra Shekhar may say, there's no doubt that most of those who voted for the Janata Dal last year thought that V.P. Singh was going to be the Prime Minister. This aura of moral authority has given the Raja his power. Even now, his personal credibility has suffered much less than his government's. But how long can he survive on this basis?



**NEHRU: The Elusive Enigma**

Nehru evokes strong feelings in people. While he has his enemies, his friends are fiercely loyal. He can count on the support of Arif Mohammad Khan and Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Inder Gujral was his nominee too

He is the master-strategist of Indian politics. It was his pushing that got Rajiv made Prime Minister in 1984 and after the cousins fell out in mid-1986, the Congress(I) regime lost its political moorings. At present, he is the one man who could guide V.P. Singh. But Nehru has chosen to remain aloof, spending most of his time abroad



tion countermanded the first Meham election, Om Prakash Chautala, Lal's errant son, had been under pressure to prove that he owed the chief ministership of Haryana to more than mere family considerations. Forced to re-contest—by public pressure—from Meham, Chautala bragged that he would win by 17,000 votes. But when the second election was also countermanded following the murder of an Independent candidate, Amir Singh, there was widespread suspicion that Chautala had been behind the killing.

V.P. Singh's first reaction had been to do nothing. When the first Meham poll had been countermanded, the threat of action against Chautala had been enough to cause Devi Lal to hand in his resignation. This time around, the wily Chaudhary was quite capable of doing something even more drastic.

**B**ut circumstances forced the Raja to act. For one, his own supporters were outraged. L.C. Jain quit as a

member of the Planning Commission following an angry article by editor Arun Shourie in the *Indian Express* (see *Spotlight*). And the Congress(I) decided that this was the perfect issue on which to demand the Prime Minister's resignation.

On Sunday, 20 May, Congress president Rajiv Gandhi took the unprecedented (for him) step of visiting Meham with an entourage of 300 cars. The former Prime Minister had clearly hoped that Meham would mark the beginning of his comeback, just as Belchi (where Harijans had been killed) was the starting point for his mother's return to the limelight during the Janata regime.

Pleased with the response his visit evoked, Rajiv felt emboldened enough to make a parliamentary in-

tervention the following day. (This marked a rare return to the floor of the Lok Sabha—he has been absent for most of this session.) He accused V.P. Singh of trying to influence

the Election Commission (over the countermanding of the Meham poll) in his capacity as Prime Minister.

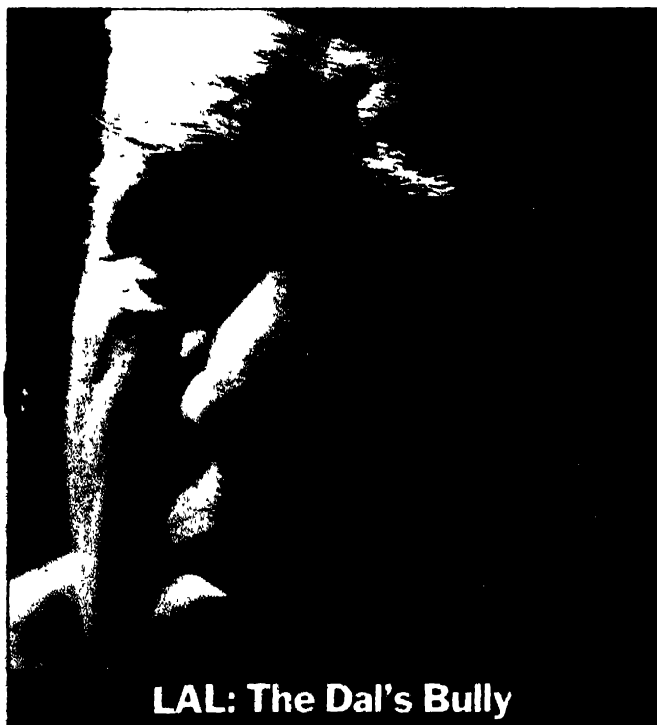
V.P. Singh said he had been acting in his capacity as leader of the Janata Dal; Rajiv did not believe him and asked for a transcript of his conversation with the Election Commissioner. The Raja got angrier and angrier and

finally shouted at the leader of the Opposition to "sit down"—a grave lapse of decorum for a Prime Minister and quite out of character for the normally tight-lipped V.P. Singh.

As the argument raged and Con-



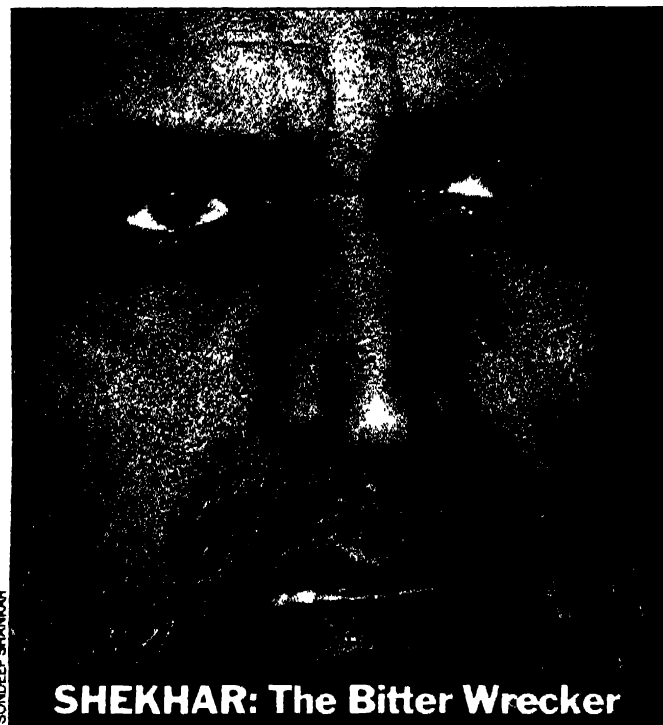
**L.K. Advani: waiting and watching**



**LAL: The Dal's Bully**

The Tau's strength comes from outside the Cabinet, though within it. Sharad Yadav will back him implicitly. But Lal also has the support of the chief ministers of four states: UP, Gujarat, Haryana and Bihar

His rustic image conceals a first-rate political brain. The Tau is often compared to Charan Singh but whereas Singh was ambitious, grasping and naive, Lal is subtler. He wants to exert real authority, even if he isn't *de jure* Prime Minister. And he knows how to keep the pressure on V.P. Singh mounting. Will not forget Chautala's ouster.



**SHEKHAR: The Bitter Wrecker**

Shekhar's men have got a bad deal in this government, though some found jobs after the recent ministry expansion. Out of the Cabinet himself, he has no support within it. His strength is destructive.

Until recently, most people had forgotten that Shekhar is a Congressman of the old school, who delights in late-night confabulations in smoke-filled rooms. He has never liked V.P. Singh, whom he regards as an ambitious phoney and after he was lied to during the leadership election has resolved to embarrass the government from outside.



# Four turning points

## RISING PRICES



**Finance minister Madhu Dandavate presents the budget**

keep prices in check combined with a lacklustre budget have added to the government's problems. The regime believes that prices will come down after the monsoon, but will that be too late?

Most opinion research suggests that while people get very angry about inflation, rarely do they withdraw support from a government solely for that reason. But the finance ministry's total inability

## KASHMIR IN FLAMES



**The mood is sullen in Srinagar**

In the public mind, Kashmir is regarded as being the V.P. Singh regime's problem, though the trouble started before this government took office. But three of the government's actions worsened the situation. First, it released terrorists in return for the home minister's daughter. Then, it made Jagmohan Governor, knowing that the state government would resign. And third, it then refused to negotiate with kidnappers, leading to the killings of hostages.

## NO PEACE IN PUNJAB



**S.S. Mann with his kirpan**

The V P Singh government made exactly the same mistake on Punjab as Rajiv Gandhi's regime. Just as Rajiv released H S Longowal and hoped that reason would prevail once the government adopted a conciliatory stand, V.P. Singh made a hero out of S S. Mann and reckoned that talk of healing and new beginnings would solve the problem.

Of course, it hasn't and the early promises have come back to haunt the Raja

## MAYHEM IN MEHAM



**Angry villagers in Meham congregate**

Nobody knows why O P Chautala decided to pin his future on Meham. When he thought he would lose the election, he resorted to violence and rigging. The resulting outcry forced VP to push for his resignation, a move that caused Devi Lal to quit instead. Chautala went after he tried similar stunts at the re-poll.

gressmen taunted Janata Dal members, Devi Lal sat silently, seething inside. Later, he accosted his party's MPs outside the Lok Sabha and raged at them for being unable to defend the government.

**B**y then, of course, there was no other course left open to V.P. Singh. To allow Chautala to continue in office was clearly unthinkable and yet, Devi Lal had to be persuaded to go along with the decision. On Sunday, 20 May, perturbed by reports of Rajiv's Meham visit, the Raja had told correspondents on board his plane (he was returning from the cyclone-affected areas of Andhra Pradesh) that he was considering dissolving the Haryana Assembly. The Congress(I),

too, had demanded the imposition of President's Rule followed by fresh election.

Now, emissaries were sent to Devi Lal informing him that these were the only options. Of the two, the dismissal of the government was clearly the less preferable. There was no guarantee that the Janata Dal would get a majority in fresh elections to the Assembly and moreover, dismissal suggested that Chautala's government had failed to maintain law and order—a clear humiliation.

On the other hand, if Chautala would agree to step down—the second option—it would entail a certain loss of face, but the Chaudhary could appoint his own nominee as the next

chief minister and maintain his grip on the state.

Put in those terms, the choice was clear. Devi Lal had to persuade his son to resign and to accept a new chief minister. The change would not reflect on Chautala's guilt or innocence: he could still maintain that he knew nothing about the murder of Amir Singh, but it would be projected as a

**Rajiv Gandhi in Meham: cashing in**





morally sound gesture. This made some sense, but the problem was that Devi Lal still did not like it. Whichever way he looked at it, Chautala's ouster seemed like a public humiliation.

So though Chautala was replaced by Banarsi Das Gupta, the Chaudhary made it clear that the move had not been to his liking. And while V.P. Singh's supporters claimed a public relations victory, the Tau seemed unlikely to forgive or forget this humiliation.

**W**hen the Raja finally took the plunge and made it clear that he would not allow Chautala to continue in office, he was working on the assumption that whatever he lost by antagonising Devi Lal would be compensated by the goodwill he would win by acting firmly. Certainly, Janata Dal spokesmen are at pains to point out that the Raja not only ended the party's crisis, but took the wind out of the Congress(I)'s sails. Says Yashwant Sinha, general secretary of the Janata Dal, "Chautala's resignation has considerably weakened the Congress. The manner in which we settled the problem makes the party look like a deflated balloon." Agrees S.R. Bommai, Janata Dal president, "You can see the difference between the Janata Dal and the Congress(I). We are a party that believes in value-based politics and has acted."

While there is little doubt that V.P. Singh managed to beat Rajiv Gandhi in this contest of wills, did he do it at the expense of the Janata Dal's future unity?

Devi Lal's supporters say that by publicly humiliating the Tau, the Raja has considerably shortened the life-expectancy of his regime.

Over the last two months, Devi Lal has brought his dislike of V.P. Singh out into the open. This became clear during the election of the Janata Dal president. The Raja's candidate was Jaipal Reddy and most observers thought he was certain to win. Then, Devi Lal decided he was going to back

S.R. Bommai, a former chief minister of Karnataka, whose antipathy to V.P. Singh and R.K. Hegde is scarcely concealed. Once the Tau issued a directive from Beijing (where he was on an official visit) to vote for Bommai, Reddy's chances receded. V.P. Singh postponed the election and then declared that far from supporting Reddy, he was totally neutral.

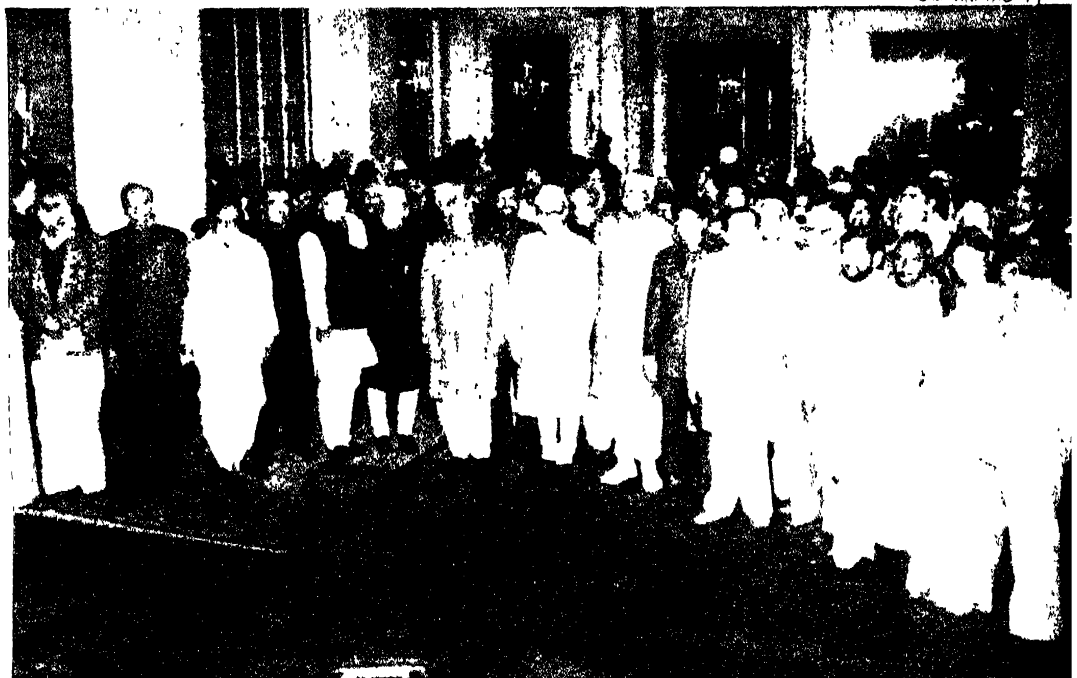
Finally, Bommai became president and V.P. Singh responded by refusing to go to the Janata Dal office to hand over charge to him and by not sending anyone to the airport to receive him when he arrived from Bangalore. Consequently, Bommai was received by the Tau's men and identified himself openly with Devi Lal's camp.

looks for ways to needle him.

A favourite tactic has been the 'letter-bomb'. Lal's moles within the government tell him what the Prime Minister is up to and he then dashes off a letter in the hope of sabotaging it. In recent months, he has written to the Raja on the following issues:

- The withdrawal of cases against the *Indian Express*. V.P. Singh was about to withdraw these on the grounds that they were politically motivated, when the Tau wrote to demand that the investigations continue.
- The nomination of Arun Shourie to the Rajya Sabha. When he heard that Shourie's nomination was being processed, Lal wrote to demand that the move be rescinded.

C.M. VINAYAGAM



V.P. Singh with his ministers and the President after the swearing-in: a time of hope

That victory won, the Tau has continued to embarrass the Prime Minister in several other ways. He appears regularly in the Central Hall of Parliament to bad-mouth V.P. Singh and

**If V.P. Singh is a Prime Minister caught up in a serious crisis, it is because his is a government without an agenda**

• The growing influence of cabinet secretary Vinod Pande. Because V.P. Singh relies so much on Pande, Lal resolved to turn their relationship into an issue. Consequently, V.P. Singh gave B.G. Deshmukh, secretary to the Prime Minister, an extension and told friendly journalists that many of Pande's functions had been transferred to Deshmukh.

• The resignation of L.C. Jain over the violence at the Meham byelection. Lal believes that R.K. Hegde put Jain up to resigning in an effort to give V.P. Singh a justification for demanding Chautala's ouster.

The letters are written in good English, suggesting that Lal has outside



# Four unresolved crises

## RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN



V.P. Singh with Pak foreign minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan

At present, V.P. Singh's position is that the Kashmir problem is entirely Pakistan's fault. He misses no opportunity to talk about the military balance and to suggest that India will go to war over Kashmir.

Consequently, relations with Pakistan have

plummeted to their lowest point since 1971. But what now? Will he carry out his threat and go to war? Will the super-powers let India do so? More to the point, is V.P. Singh in a strong enough position within his own Cabinet to wage a war?

## RAM JANMABHOOMI



The disputed site

an amicable solution" and "communal harmony." But will he back Yadav? If he does, can the BJP allow him to survive? If he doesn't, what happens to India's Muslims?

Much to everybody's surprise, UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has made it clear that he will not allow any *shilanyas* to take place at the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid site. V.P. Singh has shied away from stating his stand on the record, preferring to hide behind such generalities as "an

## ASSAM OUT OF CONTROL



ULFA militants in Assam

Because Guwahati is so far from New Delhi, the regime has been able to pretend that the situation is well under control. In fact, Assam is probably in worse shape than Punjab. The AGP government of Prafulla Mahanta is unable to control the situation and the violent agitation launched by the Marxist ULFA has made normal life impossible. There is another agitation—as violent in its methods—launched by the Bodos, which has also led to murder and sabotage.

## KEEPING THE ALLIES HAPPY



L.K. Advani (left) and Jyoti Basu

it believes it would sweep the Hindi belt. So will Advani keep VP in office for more than another 18 months?

Six months into his term, V.P. Singh has finally come to terms with the fact that you can't please both the left and right. Kashmir is a case in point. The BJP knows it is riding the crest of a wave. An election in mid-1991 would suit it perfectly because

help and each is carefully leaked to the press before it even reaches the Prime Minister.

**H**ow much damage can Lal do? His supporters point out that he has the backing of four key chief ministers (Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, B.D. Gupta and Chimanbhai Patel) and around a third of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party. But is this enough to destabilise V.P. Singh? Probably not, unless Lal can evolve a more effective strategy.

Consequently, the Chaudhary has worked out a scenario in which he emerges as the leader of all of India's backward castes. Lal's camp says that half of all Janata Dal MPs belong to

backward communities. V.P. Singh is clearly not one of them, but manages to rule because the leadership of the 'backwards' is divided. But what if all 'backwards' united under the Tau? To this end, the Chaudhary has made a sustained attempt to cultivate Ajit Singh, his rival for the leadership of the Hindi belt's Jats. Ajit is on bad terms with Mulayam Singh Yadav but now, the Chaudhary has promised to settle those differences in the name of 'backward' unity. It helps that many leaders of the backward castes who hated Chautala now recognise that he is no longer an impediment to making common cause with the Tau.

The Tau's 'backward coalition' can count on support from outside as well

There's not just party president Bommai, but Chandra Shekhar as well. On 25 May, Shekhar held a three-hour-long secret meeting with Mulayam Singh Yadav to map out strategy. He had no political ambitions himself, Shekhar told Yadav, and would support Devi Lal wholeheartedly. His only desire was to avenge the 'deceitful' manner in which V.P. Singh cheated him out of the prime ministership.

**S**hekhar has spent most of 1990 sulking quietly, but last month, there were signs that he too was ready to break his silence. Just as the Meham uproar was dying down, a new controversy arose over the conduct of



✱ Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan.

Jagmohan was originally Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Arun Nehru's choice for the job and his appointment received enthusiastic support from the BJP. Since then however, Nehru has washed his hands off him and as Jagmohan's actions got more and more extreme, the CPI(M) began to register its protests.

Last week, the Congress(I) and the CPI(M) united in Parliament to press for his recall. Then, to the mortification of the Treasury benches, Chandra Shekhar rose to speak. "My views on Jagmohan are well known," he said bitterly, before undermining the Governor's behaviour.

The controversy over Jagmohan spiralled as reports came in of the firing on the funeral procession of Moulvi Farooq, an act that even the Governor's supporters found hard to defend. The final straw, however, was an interview the Governor gave to *Current*, one of V P. Singh's favourite publications. In it, he stated boldly that "every Muslim in the Valley is a secessionist" and attributed the better economic performance of Kashmiri Hindus to their "superior intelligence".

This was the last straw and Rajiv Gandhi shot off an angry telegram to the Prime Minister demanding Jagmohan's resignation. V P. Singh noted that George Fernandes and Inder Gujral also felt the same way and feared that the Congress, Chandra Shekhar and the CPI(M) would unite to attack him in Parliament over this issue (with the tacit support of members of his Cabinet)? In something of a panic, he asked Jagmohan to step down, offering to nominate him to the Rajya Sabha instead. This, he hoped, would nip the uproar in the bud.

In fact, it created another controversy. The BJP, which had backed Jagmohan's appointment, protested his withdrawal and demanded to know why it had not been consulted on the move.

The normally soft-spoken BJP president, L.K. Advani, was angry enough to tell a press conference that he found that the government acted capriciously and without any unanimity. Two days later, he was even angrier at a press conference in Bombay. "The government's handling of both the Kashmir and the Punjab issues has been characterised by indecision and *ad hocism*," he railed. "After six

months, they have no coherent policy."

V.P. Singh hoped to mollify the BJP by also removing George Fernandes from his post as minister for Kashmir affairs. But while Advani criticised Fernandes for trying "to hold talks with secessionist forces", he took the line that the Raja's decision to fire both Jagmohan and Fernandes only "highlighted the confusion and *ad hocism*".

If things were so bad, asked a correspondent, why did the BJP still support the government? "For the simple reason that the people are still disillusioned with the Congress(I)," he retorted.

The reply was straight-forward enough, but notable in that Advani could not find one *positive* reason for supporting the regime.

convention against communalism and thrilled when the BJP attacked the left for doing so.

Within the Congress(I), some key members believed that in communalism/ secularism, they had found the perfect issue to bring the government down. Their scenario involved the Congress(I)'s making common cause with Chandra Shekhar and the left parties once a suitable provocation could be found. The firing on Moulvi Farooq's funeral procession had been one such incident, but they were confident that there would be others. And certainly, Ram Janmabhoomi would be the make-or-break issue. If V P. Singh backed Mulayam Singh Yadav's claim that he would not allow any *shulanyas* to take place, then the BJP was certain to object strongly. And if he did not, then the left would have to



(Left to right) V.P. Singh with Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar: his threats

JAGDISH YADAV

**T**he left was having similar misgivings. Throughout the last session of Parliament, communist members rose to take the government to task for its failings. Saifuddin Chowdhury complained about its handling of the Punjab problem. Subhashini Ali warned about inflation. And, the CPI's Gita Mukherjee was critical of its stand on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue.

The rumblings from the left came as a godsend for the Congress, which quickly attempted to turn communalism into a hot issue. It was pleased when the communists attended its

consider withdrawing support to the government.

From all accounts, Rajiv Gandhi was unwilling to do deals with the likes of Chandra Shekhar or to take office in a left-supported minority government, despite the intrigues of his minions.

But the former Prime Minister believed that in communalism/ secularism he had found the regime's Achilles' heel. Many Congressmen thought it probable that the BJP would withdraw support to V.P. Singh next year and force an election. At that election, the BJP would probably get the entire non-Congress vote in the Hindi belt



## "Our CM has quit"

*And now, it is Rajiv Gandhi's turn, feels Janata Dal president S.R. Bommai*

**SUNDAY: Has Chautala's resignation helped the Congress?**

**S.R. Bommai:** Absolutely not. Firstly, the Congress thought that they (Devi Lal and others) would create a problem for the Prime Minister. They expected fireworks. They have no moral strength. That day in my press conference, I demanded the resignation of Rajiv Gandhi from Parliament and so did the PM. They didn't respond. The man who was murdered, Amir

decision. Not because of Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Meham. What did he mean by taking 500 cars there? What is the message of such a large motorcade? In spite of Rajiv Gandhi raising the issue, the party was concerned about it.

**Q: What happens if the judicial enquiry proves Chautala is not guilty? Will Chautala come back?**

**A:** The prestige of the party will go up. Chautala has a right to come back then. That is why, unless there is some evidence against him, you cannot ask for the resignation of an individual before investigation. But even so, our chief minister quit. Many Congress CMs, in spite of court verdicts against them, continue to be in power. Rajiv Gandhi asking for Chautala's resignation is like the Devil quoting the Bible.

**Q: What if the enquiry finds him guilty?**

**A:** Then the action taken is justified. We came to power on the

plea of promoting value-based politics. And we acted. But then, let us wait for the people to give their verdict on Chautala, at Darba Kalan and Meham. That is where you will know if his image, or the image of the Janata Dal, has been damaged or not.

**Q: What are you doing to pull the Janata Dal together and improve its image?**

**A:** I want to hold the organisational elections on schedule, by 11 October, at all levels—primary, district, state and national. Now the enrolment drive is on. It should be intensified. The members of all the constituent units will become members automatically.

Singh, was a Janata Dal follower. He was a cover candidate for Mr Chautala. When a person is charged, he is not obliged to resign before any enquiry or investigation. As for Rajiv Gandhi, he was bound to resign after Chautala quit. That is why he did not even turn up in the House the next day. You can see the difference between us. Here is a party which believes in value-based politics and has acted. And here is a man who runs away from the field.

**Q: Wasn't it because Rajiv visited Meham and protested in Parliament that the Janata Dal acted? Wasn't it forced to act?**

**A:** V.P. Singh responded to a party

while the Congress, having regained Muslim support, would do far better. In this scenario, the BJP and the Congress squeezed the Janata Dal's share of the vote to nothingness.

Wishful thinking? Absolutely, said the Janata Dal. But the scenario had already got both the BJP and the Congress(I) thinking

**S**ix months after he took office, V.P. Singh finds he must cope with crises at two levels

At one level, there are the actual problems of governance. Despite the optimism when he took over, Punjab is no nearer a solution and both Kashmir and Assam have got worse. Relations with Pakistan have plummeted—a war hysteria created, though nobody is very sure what India would gain from a war. None of these problems is easy to solve.

At another level, there are the problems of cohesion. Last year, V.P. Singh would pooh-pooh those who suggested that a Janata Dal government would face the same problems of unity as the 1977-79 Janata experiment. Now, nobody is laughing. Because of the manner of his accession, the Raja antagonised Chandra Shekhar even before the Cabinet was announced. And now with Devi Lal out to wreck the government, the Prime Minister's problems have mounted. Part of the problem lies in V.P. Singh's own style. In the early days of his term, much was made of his ability to manage contradiction. Now, this same ability is being seen as indecisiveness or even duplicity.

Some instances

- Rather than choose between K.P. Unnikrishnan and Sam Pitroda, he fired them both
- He did the same with Kashmir, getting rid of both Jagmohan and George Fernandes
- He told Ajit Singh that he would back him for the chief ministership of UP and then backed out as Mulayam Singh Yadav emerged as the stronger contender
- He pressed Jaipal Reddy to stand for the Janata Dal presidency and then, declared that he was neutral when the Tau plumed for S.R. Bommai
- He said he would not be vindictive, yet each month his men file new FIRs that are never followed up

In the process, V.P. Singh has alienated many of those he could once count on. Chief among them is Arun



HAJESH KUMAR



Nehru, who was once his master strategist. Over the last four months, however, Nehru has effectively distanced himself from this government and spent most of his time abroad. His key supporter, Arif Mohammad Khan, has been damaged by leaks from the Prime Minister's Office and has found it impossible to function as aviation minister because of the Raja's dogged insistence on grounding the A320s.

The V P Singh camp has retaliated by putting it about that Nehru and Arif are negotiating to join the Congress. Nehru has been particularly incensed by reports that an IAS officer of the UP cadre has been deputed by cabinet secretary Vinod Pande to investigate Nehru's links with the Congress(I).

Similarly, Biju Patnaik, who was once regarded as the Janata Dal's kingmaker, has also lost much of his old affection for the Raja and takes an independent stance. On a recent

visit to New Delhi, he asked for an appointment with the Prime Minister only to be told that V P Singh's schedule was too tight. Patnaik was livid and made his displeasure known. A concerned V.P. Singh then turned up at Orissa Bhavan at midnight to personally apologise. Patnaik kept him waiting for 15 minutes and then, when he emerged, seemed sceptical of V P. Singh's claims that he really had been very busy that day.

Even Ajit Singh, the veteran flip-flop man of the Dal, is annoyed by V P. Singh's decision to disown him after he visited Meham. Ajit had cleared his visit with the Raja, but the Prime Minister wrote to Devi Lal to say that he knew nothing about it.

**I**t is hard not to be reminded of the experience of the 1977-79 Janata regime. Though nobody gives him the credit for it—just as nobody acknow-

ledged it of Morarji Desai in 1977—V.P. Singh had made many valuable contributions to India's governance. He has strengthened the institutions of democracy, made Parliament a vibrant and important body, re-introduced Cabinet government and dismantled the trappings of Rajiv Gandhi's Imperial Prime Ministerial.

But if he is a Prime Minister caught up in a serious crisis, it is because his is a government without an agenda. In 1977, the Janata regime comprised a coalition of anti-Congress forces whose only intention was to end Emergency rule. Once they had done that, they floundered because they were not united on what to do next.

So it has been with this government. It promised to end the corruption of the last days of the Rajiv raj and it succeeded. But having done that, all it could do was file FIR after FIR and leak more and more fantastic stories

to the press in an effort to keep the corruption issue alive.

V P Singh has no vision of India beyond that of a policeman's. Few would deny him the credit he deserves for having cleaned the system up, but what now? Is his India going to be a regional super-power? If not, then why are we on worse terms with our neighbours than ever before? Is his India one that can compete effectively in the post-glasnost world? If so, then where does the rustic vision of Devi Lal fit in? And so on.

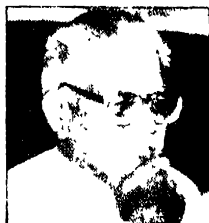
The Prime Minister's advisers say that he needs to win back friends within the government. Perhaps, he does. But, more important, he needs to know where he is going. No government can deliver if it has forgotten to work out what it is going to do. Remember the collapse of 1979? ●

**Rajiv Shukla/ New Delhi**

## STATE SUPPORT



**Chimanbhai Patel** (Gujarat)



**Devi Lal has the backing of four key chief ministers and around a third of**

**the Dal Parliamentary Party. But is this enough to destabilise V.P. Singh? Probably not, unless Lal can work out a more effective strategy**



**Mulayam Singh Yadav** (UP)



**Benarsi Das Gupta** (Haryana)



**Laloo Prasad Yadav** (Bihar)



# Behind the mayhem

*The Tau's sons fight as Haryana seems to be slipping out of his grasp*

**T**hen numbers were impressive. On 27 May, Om Prakash Chautala was elected to the Haryana Assembly from the Darba Kalan constituency, having polled 63,955 votes. His nearest rival, Jagdish Mehra of the Congress(I), got only 9,400, giving Chautala an incredible victory margin of 54,555 votes. Mehra lost his deposit and so did the seven other Independent candidates.

The timing, alas, was unfortunate. Only four days before, Chautala had been forced to step down as chief minister of Haryana following the murder of Amir Singh, an Independent candidate at the byelection to the Meham constituency.

At the time, Chautala had claimed that he was certain to win from Darba Kalan, but the argument had cut no ice with Prime Minister V P Singh. As far as the Janata Dal was concerned, Chautala had sworn—when the first Meham byelection was countermanded—that he would return to the Assembly from Meham and nowhere else. Now that the second Meham election had also been countermanded, he had no right to remain in office.

Faced with pressure from the entire party, Chautala and his father acceded to the Prime Minister's demand. For Devi Lal, it was a humiliation he was unlikely to forget. But for Chautala, the demand for his resignation posed another, more immediate, problem: would control of the state now pass to his estranged brother, Ranjit Singh?

**W**hile Chaudhary Devi Lal has made it clear that all those who oppose Chautala are his enemies as well, the fact remains that even the Tau's closest allies are less than ena-

moured of his errant son.

According to Chautala's critics, if an Assembly election were to be called in Haryana today, the Janata Dal would be hard-pressed to win more than a dozen seats for the following reasons:

- Under Chautala, corruption has reached a peak.
- The Green Brigade, Chautala's hand-picked Gestapo, has alienated the poor and the helpless. There is also anger over the manner in which the brigade rigged the municipal elections.
- The Janata Dal regime has not honoured many of the promises made by Devi Lal during the 1987 election campaign. One of them—the pledge to waive rural loans worth Rs 248 crores—attracted much attention in 1987. But, in fact, only Rs 40 crores worth of loans have been written off.
- It would not have been that difficult for Chautala to have won in Meham but for the fact that Devi Lal insulted the *chaubisi* (the committee of 24 villages which make up the constituency). The headmen wanted Devi Lal to personally request them to support his son. Instead, the Tau publicly declared—at Chautala's urging, apparently—that he was not about to





waste his time dealing with the people through such middlemen as the *chaubisi*

For all these reasons, the first byelection at Meham became the focus of an unnecessary crisis. The *chaubisi* put up Anand Singh Dangri, a Dal rebel, who is no paragon of electoral virtue, though nobody was sure that he could defeat Chautala.

The chief minister, however, took no chances. Though there are only 1,05,000 voters in Meham, he sent 30,000 policemen to the constituency. All roads to Meham were blocked by the police and only Chautala's riggers were allowed through the barricades. When complaints about ballot-stuffing reached the Election Commission, it ordered a partial repoll. When this turned violent, it countermanded the election.

**Devi Lal looks on as Chautala congratulates Gupta: will the new CM take the other son's side?**

That crisis should have led to Chautala's ouster, except that Devi Lal then submitted his resignation from the government and staged a rival drama to draw attention away from Meham and protect his son.

When Chautala declared his intention of standing from Darba Kalan, his enemies made it clear that they would not be silenced unless he was elected from Meham. Instead of ignoring this threat,

Chautala in a fit of bravado, declared that he would re-enter the Assembly only from Meham and that his majority would be in excess of 17,000.

On the eve of the second election, Amir Singh, an Independent can-

**The results of the Darba Kalan election show that Chautala is not quite the spent force his detractors like to portray him as**

didate who was Chautala's dummy, told a New Delhi tabloid that he feared that Dangri would kill a candidate in an effort to have the election countermanded.

Amir Singh did not realise that he would be that candidate. But was it Dangri who had him killed? The evidence suggests otherwise. Half an hour before he was murdered, Amir Singh was seen with Abhay Singh, Chautala's delinquent son. At 2.30 am,

he was taken away by two persons—one of whom has links with the Green Brigade.

A few hours later, his bullet-ridden body was discovered.

If Chautala was, in fact, behind the murder, then he had made a major miscalculation. Such was the outrage that there was no way the Janata Dal high command could allow him to continue in office. Having threatened to resign once, Devi Lal could hardly pull the same stunt again. Besides, even such supporters of the Tau as Chimanbhai Patel and Mulayam Singh Yadav believed that he would be better off without Chautala there to embarrass him.

By the time the Chaudhary recognised that Chautala would have to go, he saw that he had two options:

- He could keep the chief ministership within the family.
- Chautala could continue to run the state by proxy.

Curiously, these were not one and the same thing. If he kept the chief ministership within the family, then he would have to give the job to his son Ranjit Singh. But Chautala and Ranjit hate each other and such a move would have the effect of finishing Chautala in Haryana.

Ranjit had one powerful advocate, Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav. On the afternoon of 22 May, Ranjit arrived at Devi Lal's official residence in New Delhi with wife, two children and Yadav in tow.

Would he succeed his brother, asked the press. "I will abide by my father's decision," said Ranjit smugly, his manner making it clear that he knew that the decision would go in his favour. And later in the evening, reporters caught him speaking to





# "I will follow my leader"

*Banarsi Das Gupta on his priorities as chief minister*

**SUNDAY:** It is obvious from your choice of six ministers that you have given representation to only one political group—the pro-Chautala one.

**Banarsi Das Gupta:** There are no groups in the party. All are equal.

**Q:** Even after your appointment as chief minister, will the threat to Dangi's life continue?

**A:** There is no threat to Dangi's life. He is just pretending to be scared.

**Q:** Will Chautala become CM again after winning from Darba Kalan?

**A:** You can put this question to the PM and to the president of the Janata Dal. He resigned on the orders of the high command. Whether he comes back or not depends on the high command. As for me, I will follow the directive of my leader, my high command. If they tell me to resign, I will do so.

**Q:** Is there any possibility of the BJP joining your government?

**A:** We are prepared to take in the BJP. But whether they join or not depends on them. We were prepared to take them in earlier and so was Chautalasaab. But we have not had any talks with them. But we will request them to join us.

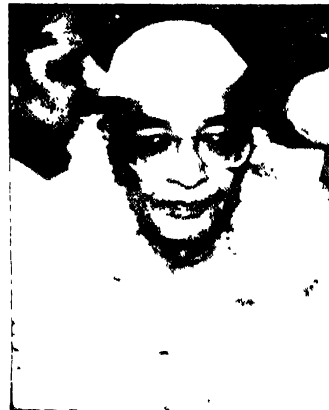
**Q:** It is said that you are a stop-gap chief minister.

**A:** You can define me in any way you like. But I don't have these

feelings. All I know is that I have taken the place vacated by chief minister Chautala. The party high command has told me to take on the responsibility.

**Q:** What are your priorities as chief minister?

**A:** My first priority is to ensure the overall development of the state. We are an agricultural state. Our first needs are power and water. The SYL canal is Haryana's lifeline. Soon after the National Front government came to power, our CM (Chautala) met the PM and other ministers. They decided that work on the canal would be completed by 31 December, 1990. It will be my endeavour to see that the water reaches by that date. We are doing very well agriculturally.



**"Allegations of dynastic rule are made against Devi Lal too often. That is why he wanted someone who wasn't from his family to become CM"**

Hukum Singh and Banarsi Das Gupta Chautala wanted Hukum Singh, but Ranjit made it clear that he would not support him. Chautala was not perturbed because, at that stage, most

But industrially, we need to develop

**Q:** Why didn't you include Ranjit Singh in your Cabinet?

**A:** This is not worth answering. I have included some members of the earlier ministry and made them Cabinet ministers.

**Q:** What will be the fate of the Disneyland project?

**A:** That is under the Haryana Tourism Development Corporation. They are studying it. How did Disneyland come up when I was talking of priorities (laughs). I would like to add that it is also my priority to give the state a clean administration. Corruption will be removed as far as possible and people will be given justice. Thousands of cases are being settled every day in villages. These are cases for which people would have had to run to courts for years.

**Q:** Devi Lal said today that he wanted you as chief minister because he didn't want to give anyone a chance of accusing him of perpetuating dynastic rule. That is why he didn't want Ranjit Singh to replace his other son.

**A:** What he said is that allegations of casteism and dynastic rule are made against him too often. That is why he wanted someone who wasn't from his family or caste to become chief minister. This was his wish. But he didn't impose it on anyone.

Mulayam Singh Yadav on the phone. "You have arranged everything," he told him gratefully. "That is how it is going to be."

**E**xcept that Ranjit had seriously underestimated his brother. That evening, Chautala caught Devi Lal's feet and cried. By appointing Ranjit, he said, the Chaudhary was arranging for his political demise. He would have to retire from politics.

The emotional blackmail worked. Devi Lal began to examine the other contenders for the post. They were,

observers believed that Gupta would turn the job down, leaving the Tau with no option but to appoint Hukum Singh.

By then, however, Ranjit had contacted Gupta and made it clear to him that together, the two stood a good chance of weakening Chautala's hold on the state. And so, when the Chaudhary asked him if he would become chief minister, Banarsi Das Gupta declared at once that he would take the job.

Flummoxed by this miscalculation, Chautala was unable to prevent Devi

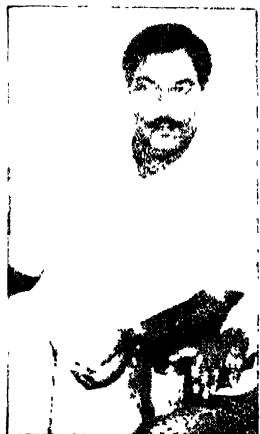


Lal from instructing Janata Dal MLAs to vote for Gupta. But he was able to ensure that when the legislature party gathered to elect its leader, it also passed a resolution praising him for having developed the state.

The resolution came as a surprise to Ranjit's supporters. One of them, Rann Singh Mann even protested that MLAs had not been given copies of the resolution before the meeting. But he was overruled and the legislature party placed on record its admiration for Chautala's glorious efforts on behalf of Haryana.

**A**t one level, Chautala has lost. He has been forced to give up the chief ministership and his successor may well take Ranjit's side. But as the

**"Nobody has any strength without Chaudhary Devi Lal. He is the only hope of the Janata Dal in Haryana. We could never take his place"**



results of the Darba Kalan election show, the former chief minister is not quite the spent force his detractors like to portray him as.

More worrying for the Janata Dal were the results of the byelections in the Ambala cantonment seat. The BJP retained the seat (which it had won in 1987 with Devi Lal's support), but the victory margin was narrow—3,155 seats. The Congress(I) candidate, Ramdas Dhamija, polled 19,055 votes, bringing him within striking distance of the BJP's Anil Vij's tally of 22,210 votes.

Traditionally, the voters of Haryana swing wildly from party to party. At the moment, Devi Lal's Janata Dal is secure because the Congress(I) is too preoccupied with its own internal battles. But, in the long run, the message of Meham is that regardless of which of his sons triumph, the Chaudhary needs to pay more attention to his base if he is to retain his pre-eminent position in Janata Dal politics. •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**

## "I have no regrets"

*Ranjit Singh on B.D. Gupta's election as Haryana chief minister*

**SUNDAY:** Do you believe that Banarsi Das Gupta's appointment as chief minister will resolve the crisis in the Janata Dal?

**Ranjit Singh:** I don't think there is any crisis now. Banarsi Das Gupta has been unanimously elected leader of the party. So I don't think anybody will create any problems for him. We will fully cooperate with him. He is our leader. He should be given a chance. And I do hope he will deliver the goods.

**Q:** The next election in Haryana is after about one and a half years. Do you think Banarsi Das Gupta can restore the image of the party by then?

**A:** Nobody has any strength without Chaudhary Devi Lal. It was with Chaudhary Devi Lal's strength that we won the 1987 election. Chaudhary Devi Lal—and may God give him a long life—is the

only hope of the Janata Dal in Haryana. B.D. Gupta and Ranjit Singh and others are making their contributions. But we could never take the place of Devi Lal.

**Q:** Chautala has been called the "spoilt brat of Haryana". Do you think Devi Lal might want to remove him from the state and bring him to the Centre?

**A:** It depends on the talks between V.P. Singh, S.R. Bommai and Devi Lal. They are the senior leaders. They will understand where best he can be utilised.

**Q:** What happened to make Devi Lal change his mind from making you CM to making Banarsi Das Gupta CM? The lobby for you was strong—you had Laloo Prasad and the central leadership on your side—until Monday night. But why didn't things work out in your favour?

**A:** In politics, it is not one factor that matters but many. It was decided that the party would elect a new leader and when the meeting was held, we decided on B.D. Gupta. It was done routinely. And we have no regrets about it.

**Q:** It is said that Chautala is a grassroots man. He has a lot of support in the party. Do you think you can say the same for yourself?

**A:** This is a question which can only be answered if you go to the people and party workers. They are the right persons to reply. People are the best judge. Once Chaudhary Devi Lal said Ranjit Singh is a non-political man. But when I fought the election in 1987, I won. And when Chaudhary Devi Lal was asked why he had given me the party ticket if he thought I was apolitical, he replied: "I have never visited Ranjit's constituency. Ranjit has won on his own."

As the minister for agriculture, I netted in record revenue for the government. Devi Lal even issued a circular to every Cabinet minister, saying that he wanted each of them to follow my example. Even Om Prakash has said in the House—and it is on record—that "I have the honour to have a brother like Ranjit." How can I be a non-political man?

**Q:** Has there recently been a family reunion between you, Chautala and Devi Lal?

**A:** As far as social customs are concerned, we are all one. But politically, there can be differences. There can even be differences with Chaudhary Devi Lal. Even with Om Prakash. And one should have his own conscience. If I feel something is against my principles, I don't care for anyone. I don't care for status or personality. In a democracy, if we are not free ourselves, how do you expect us to give people a good government?



# Dramatic developments

*Mirwaiz Farooq is murdered, Governor Jagmohan resigns and George Fernandes loses charge of Kashmir*

**A** month before Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq was shot dead on 21 May by three unidentified gunmen inside his Nagin office in Srinagar, the religious leader of the Kashmiris had dismissed the idea that there was any threat to his life. "They are my people," he had asserted, adding, "it would be an insult for me to agree to the security the state administration keeps offering me. Didn't they see how many people came to the Jama Masjid on the morning of Id?" But the 46-year-old Moulvi had obviously misjudged the intentions of those he considered "his people". With his murder the politics of the Valley has entered yet another uncertain phase. And despite the Centre at last conceding one of the demands of the Kashmiris—the removal of Governor Jagmohan—the people were still seething with anger.

This year's Id congregation turned out to be the last one that the Moulvi addressed, but it was the rain gods more than his popularity which had ensured an impressive turn-out. The night before, the religious head had spent many agonising hours as several militant organisations had asked the people of the Valley to boycott Moulvi Farooq's congregation at the Jama Masjid and, instead, gather at the sprawling Idgah grounds. But a nagging downpour led the militants to change their minds the field had become too wet and muddy. Besides, the government had packed the Idgah grounds with paramilitary forces, hoping to lay its hands on quite a few militants.

The crowds that listened to Mirwaiz Farooq's inflammatory speech that day could not have imagined that they would have to gather at the Idgah

grounds four weeks later for the Moulvi's funeral. Though Mirwaiz's family was all along bitterly opposed to Sheikh Abdullah, Moulvi Farooq was a popular figure in the Valley and commanded a respectable following. And this is largely due to the political role that the religious leader was playing since 1977, when Mirwaiz Farooq's party, the Awami Action Committee (AAC), opposed Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference (NC) in the Assembly elections. In 1983, however, the Moulvi declared a temporary truce and joined hands with Farooq Abdullah. Observers point out that over the years, there was a distinct change in Mirwaiz Farooq's stand—he had more or less given up the idea of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan.

By the 1987 Assembly elections, the Moulvi had fallen out with Farooq

**Moulvi Farooq: brutally murdered**



Abdullah. And ever since the turmoil in the Valley, Mirwaiz Farooq had vociferously supported the cause of the militants, though he was not very happy with the methods adopted by the extremists in their fight with the Indian government. In private conversations with journalists, the religious leader often wondered why the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) had resorted to mindless violence, "driving the movement for *azaadi* deeper and deeper into the underground." Only days before the brutal murder, Moulvi Farooq had said: "My motto is, 'Live and let others live'. I am opposed to tyranny, dictatorship and gangsterism, and I will continue to fight these dark forces."

On 21 May, the Moulvi's "fight" came to an abrupt end. On the morning of that fateful Monday, unidentified assailants entered Mirwaiz's office and pumped bullets into his body. The Moulvi's wife, Mahbooba, and his son and two daughters heard the gunshots and rushed to the office room. "I saw a man in a bush-shirt climbing the garden wall," recalled Umar Farooq, the Moulvi's son and heir to the title of Mirwaiz. Hours later, Mirwaiz Farooq succumbed to his injuries at the Soura Medical Institute. Recounted Mohammed Yakub Wakil, the Moulvi's secretary: "My leader's last wish was that we should unitedly complete the mission of achieving the right to self-determination for which he had laid down his life. The Moulvi, however, didn't say anything about who his assassins were."





(From left) The funeral procession; paramilitary forces keep vigil after the firing; facing the wrath of the masses

**H**ardly had the people recovered from the shock of the Moulvi's murder when more bloodshed followed. The funeral of the religious head also turned out to be a nightmare for his followers. As the long procession of mourners was winding its way to downtown Rajouri Kadal, the Moulvi's ancestral home, the chanting of verses from the Koran was suddenly interrupted by the sounds of rapid gunfire. Unprovoked, a CRPF battalion on duty near the Islamia College in Srinagar opened fire on the procession. Eyewitnesses confirmed that the Mirwaz's pall-bearers were gunned down, but another set of volunteers prevented the body from falling to the ground. "Three bullets hit the corpse," said a member of the Moulvi's family. "As if 16 were not enough."

As news of the Moulvi's assassination and the firing on the funeral procession by the cops reached Delhi, members of both the Houses of Parliament criticised Governor Jagmohan's inept handling of the situation. And even though the Centre promptly sacked Jagmohan—the official line is that the Governor submitted his resignation after the tragedy—the Kashmiris were not to be placated. What incensed the people is the state administration and the central govern-

ment's efforts to justify the police firing.

Many of those who were injured during the shoot-out said that though the Moulvi's supporters were emo-

tionally surcharged, none of the processionists were armed. And even though there was no trouble, the jawans of the 69th CRPF battalion started firing as they saw crowds approaching the Islamia College in Hawal.



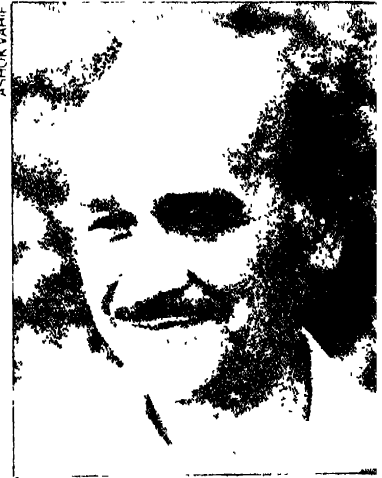
**Whatever little the Centre gained by removing Jagmohan (right), was lost after George Fernandes was relieved of the special charge of Kashmir affairs**

The official version of the incident is different. It says that the paramilitary forces opened fire after a CRPF picket near the Islamia College was attacked by terrorists. "Taking advantage of the situation, the terrorists mingled with the funeral crowds and started firing at the security forces from their AK-47 rifles. The CRPF personnel had to open fire in self-defence," said a senior state government official.

Whatever be the truth, the Moulvi's death and the incidents that followed ended four months of Jagmohan's rule in Kashmir.

**J**ust over a hundred days is indeed a short period to achieve the sort of notoriety that Jagmohan did. The strong measures that he took to restore what he called "law and order" in the Valley only fuelled the separatist fire and strengthened the hands of the militants. What is perhaps more important is the fact that whatever little popular support the Indian government had in the state, vanished during





(Above) Gary Saxena; (left) Jagmohan meeting people; (right) Kashmiris protesting the murder of Mirwaiz Farooq; politics in the state takes a new turn

#### Jagmohan's tenure

Four months back, Jagmohan arrived in Srinagar, hands folded, to administer the "healing touch", which the Centre felt was the need of the hour in Kashmir. But soon, the Governor became an enemy of the Kashmiris primarily due to the repressive measures he adopted to quell discontent in the Valley. Ironically enough, Jagmohan assumed charge of Kashmir on the day when paramilitary forces fired on crowds at Gow Kadal, killing more than 60 people. And he had to resign after the forces opened fire on the funeral procession of Moulvi Farooq. In between there were at least a thousand deaths and over 5,000 people had been arrested. But despite these strong-arm measures, peace in Kashmir was still a distant dream.

The 21 May tragedy only exposed the repressive policy that was being adopted by Jagmohan. And it alienated the Kashmiris even further. But even as members of different political parties urged the Prime Minister to sack Jagmohan, few people in the Valley believed that the Governor would actually go. For, Jagmohan had the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and everyone knew that V P Singh couldn't just afford to ignore the party. Besides, most politicians in the Valley were convinced that the Prime Minister had no definite policy on Kashmir.

Why then was Jagmohan asked to quit? Because, V P Singh realised belatedly that Jagmohan was not the answer for Kashmir's woes. When it became evident that the Governor was messing up things in the Valley, several heavyweights in the Union ministry, notably George Fernandes, who was given additional charge of Kashmir affairs, lobbied for Jagmohan's removal. And Fernandes had every reason to seek the Governor's ouster. Jagmohan, it may be recalled, did not even allow George Fernandes to visit Kashmir and made things difficult for the minister.

One reason why the Prime Minister did not remove Jagmohan was due to the fact that though the Governor was hated by the Kashmiris, he enjoyed the support of most people outside Kashmir. And the Hindus of the Valley looked upon Jagmohan as their saviour.

But the greatest hurdle was the BJP. A few days before Jagmohan was removed, several prominent individuals met BJP leaders to seek their views on the Kashmir Governor. And after being assured that they would not make an issue out of Jagmohan's removal, the Prime Minister waited patiently for an opportunity to drop the axe. After all, the militants shouldn't be given the impression that the Centre was giving in to their demands.

V P Singh didn't have to wait too long to remove Jagmohan. The Moulvi's murder and the incidents that followed gave him the opportunity he was looking for. Even the Governor's staunch supporters in the Union Cabinet—Arun Nehru, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Arif Mohammad Khan—could do little to save Jagmohan after paramilitary forces gunned down 60 mourners during Mirwaiz Farooq's funeral. The issue was raised in both the Houses of Parliament, where several MPs, including Chandra Shekhar, demanded Jagmohan's res-







call from the Prime Minister asking him to speak to home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed immediately. Fernandes rushed to the Mufti's residence only to learn that the home minister was closeted with V.P. Singh. Later, the Prime Minister rang up Fernandes again and told him that it would be a good idea to wind up the special cell on Kashmir, since the BJP's Kedar Nath Sahani had already withdrawn from the body in protest against Jagmohan's dismissal.

Sources close to the Union railway minister say that George Fernandes was completely taken aback by the Prime Minister's suggestion. And though Fernandes readily agreed with V.P. Singh, observers feel that he may resign from the Union Cabinet in disgust.

ignation. On 24 May, Jagmohan was summoned to Delhi and asked to resign. The next day, the government appointed Girish (Gary) Saxena as Governor of Kashmir. A surprise choice, since the two names that were being tossed about were those of home secretary Naresh Chandra and K.F. Rustomji. But what clinched the issue in favour of Saxena was the fact that as security adviser to the Prime Minister, he was already advising V.P. Singh on Kashmir. Interestingly, George Fernandes was not even con-

sulted on Saxena's appointment, even though he was still the minister in charge of Kashmir.

**B**ut whatever little the government gained by removing Jagmohan was frittered away after George Fernandes was relieved of the special charge of Kashmir. Fernandes was away in Cairo when Jagmohan resigned and his successor appointed. After returning to Delhi, George Fernandes was all set to visit the Valley when the minister received a

For the people in the Valley, the recent dramatic development is a clear indication that the Centre is fed up with the carrot-and-stick policy, and has instead opted for the hard line. People have already begun talking of Gary Saxena as a strict police officer, who will not hesitate to pursue Jagmohan's repressive methods. Whatever his detractors might say, George Fernandes was one leader who was acceptable to the Kashmiris and his ouster at this crucial stage will cut off the people in the Valley from New Delhi. More important, the efforts to revive political activity in the state will in all probability be dropped. Simply because, there is no one after George Fernandes to attempt the bold experiment.

But it is too early to judge Saxena. The former IPS officer has said that he is prepared to open a dialogue with the militants and ensure that conditions are created for the Kashmiris to exercise their democratic rights within the framework of the Indian Constitution. An encouraging beginning. But the Governor should also realise that the militants will demand nothing short of *azaadi*. The following months will tell whether Gary Saxena will succeed in his attempts to woo the Kashmiris. But one thing is sure: the quest for peace in the Valley will not be an easy one. •

**Shiraz Sidhva/Srinagar and New Delhi**

**Martyrs' graveyard: heroes of a community**





# Early warnings

*Is the LTTE-Colombo relationship set to deteriorate even further?*

**P**olitics may make strange bedfellows—but rarely as puzzling as Premadasa and Prabhakaran. When the Tamil militant leader agreed, a year ago, to settle his differences with the Sri Lankan government across a table, his decision was met with surprise and disbelief. Nothing will come of the talks, the cynics—particularly New Delhi—had scoffed. What kind of agreement can be reached between a secessionist and a man who swears by a unitary state? Those who raised such questions had missed the point. For, the decision to negotiate had little to do with a shift in ideological positions or a change of political heart.

Rather, it had to do with sheer expediency. Both parties suddenly realised that they shared a common, overriding interest. Velupillai Prabhakaran and his battle-weary Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sorely needed an end to the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF's) military offensive. And President Ranasinghe Premadasa—who was always opposed to the Indian Army's induction—had to ensure that it pulled out in order to establish a measure of credibility with the majority Sinhalese. So, if the LTTE-Colombo relationship suddenly thawed, it was largely because the two subscribed—if only unwittingly—to that old and cynical aphorism: your enemy's enemy is your friend.

With the 'enemy' having left Sri Lanka (the last IPKF soldier pulled

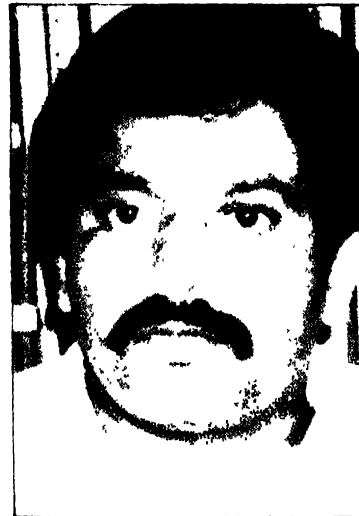
out at the end of this March), a rift in the relationship—which has been described variously as "cordial", "accommodating", "trusting" and "firm"—was on the cards. After all, India had been the cohesive factor and with its troops having come home, the rationale for that seemingly cosy friendship no longer existed.

**A**ll the same, few suspected that cracks would appear so soon. Over the last month, a number of developments have threatened to sour

the LTTE-Colombo relationship and, if things follow their present course, there is a danger that it could turn irretrievably rancid.

Early this May, an LTTE hit squad assassinated the outspoken and flamboyant Tamil United Liberation Front MP, Sam Tambimuttu, in the heart of Colombo. Although the Tigers denied a hand in the murder, most people in Sri Lanka had no doubts about their involvement. Predictably, the Sri Lankan government attempted to play down the assassination and pointedly avoided holding the LTTE responsible. But the hit, which also killed Tambimuttu's wife Kala, shattered the complacency of the island's intelligentsia, which believed that—with the Indian Army no longer present, the LTTE having been 'won over' and Sinhala extremism under check—Sri Lanka had put violence behind it. The murder put pressure on Premadasa's government, for suddenly people began asking: how far is Colombo willing to go in checking the LTTE's unlawful acts?

There were more problems for Premadasa in the middle of the month. In eastern Kalu-manai, the LTTE abducted 19 policemen who were 'interrogated' in 'custody' for a day before being released. Similar incidents involving the police and the Tigers have been carried in the island's newspapers. One report had it that the Sri Lankan Air Force flew some of its Sia Marcheti fighters over Jaffna to register the government's distaste with the LTTE's behaviour.



R. Premadasa (left) and V. Prabhakaran: strange bedfellows



The IPKF : brought the LTTE and Colombo together



But, by and large, Colombo has refrained from making a hue and cry about the incidents. As in the case of Tambimuttu's murder, it has bought—or at least gone along with—the LTTE leadership's line that such acts are the doing of junior cadres who are not always possible to control. Clearly, Premadasa is still willing to give the Tigers a very long rope in his effort to draw them into the constitutional mainstream.

Nevertheless, his government has appeared firm and inflexible over its decision to hold talks with the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the rival Tamil militant organisation which had administered the North-Eastern Province with the support of the IPKF. The talks, which ended with the EPRLF agreeing to participate in the All Party Conference (APC)—Premadasa's bid to find a solution to the country's problems through the politics of consensus—have caused the Tigers no end of heartburn. The LTTE has described the decision to parley “with a group that wanted to mortgage the island to a foreign aggressive power” as an “insult to the Tamils as well as the Sinhalese”.

Although Colombo has said that its talks with the EPRLF “have in no way diminished or devalued the importance of the negotiations it was having with the LTTE”, the Tigers were not appeased. For, they believed that the government was reneging on an unspoken understanding that the LTTE would be treated as the sole representative of the Tamils. Last week, the Tigers boycotted a session of the APC, without so much as advancing a reason for their absence.

If the LTTE feels frustrated, it is largely because its talks with the Sri Lankan government have made little or no headway. The deadlock has arisen from the LTTE's insistence that it will participate in the proposed fresh election to the North-Eastern Provincial Council only if the Sixth Amend-



**LTTE militants: powerful military machine**

ment is repealed. The Amendment outlaws all parties which profess secessionism from participating in the electoral process. The Tigers claim that the Amendment is unacceptable because of its historicity—it was passed after the July 1983 communal riots, in which hundreds of Tamils were killed, and was aimed at appeasing Sinhala sentiment.

If the government hasn't scrapped the Amendment yet, it is partly because it can do so only with a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The ruling United National Party (UNP) is

25 votes short of the required number and although a wafer-thin majority could be mustered with the help of friendly parties, Premadasa could be unwilling to take the risk. Moreover, there is considerable opposition within the island to having the Amendment repealed, an act, which many believe, would be tantamount to tacitly pardoning secessionism.

The other LTTE grouse relates to the dissolution of the North-Eastern Provincial Council, which was administered by the EPRLF and its allies. Although the Sri Lankan government has been consulting constitutional experts for some time now in order to find a way of doing so, no concrete solutions have emerged. It appears as if Colombo is now willing to wait until June when the council will automatically be dissolved for failing the constitutional requirement of sitting at least once every three months. The last council meeting was held in Trincomalee this March, before the final batch of the IPKF left for home.

If fresh elections to the council are not called soon, the LTTE-Colombo relationship could well deteriorate further. It is a prospect that must worry Premadasa as the LTTE has become the cornerstone of his strategy for finding a permanent solution to problems in the north and east. If the talks break down and the truce is called off, then Premadasa will have real trouble on his hands. This time, there will be no India to do the fighting for him. And as the LTTE has so conclusively proved in its battle with the IPKF, it is a formidable military machine. Premadasa will have to think long and hard before he prepares to take it on. •

**Mukund  
Padmanabhan**

## SORE POINTS

- **THE TAMBIMUTTU MURDER:** The assassination of the TULF MP allegedly by an LTTE hit squad has embarrassed Premadasa's government.
- **CLASHES WITH THE POLICE:** Colombo has been forced to be silent over the assault and abduction of policemen by LTTE in the island's east.
- **THE SIXTH AMENDMENT:** The LTTE wants the Amendment (which proscribes secessionist parties) repealed. But the government has either been unable or unwilling to do so.
- **COUNCIL DISSOLUTION:** Colombo has not yet delivered on the LTTE demand that the North-Eastern Provincial Council be dissolved. However, this may be done soon.
- **FRESH ELECTIONS:** If the government fails to hold fresh elections—with Tiger participation—to the council soon, then the LTTE-Colombo relationship may deteriorate further.



**T**he relationship between politicians and bureaucrats in Delhi is as complex, subtle and full of nuances as the one between a husband and a traditional Indian wife. The politician plays the role of the husband and the bureaucrat that of a dutiful, apparently meek, submissive wife. In fact, some politicians play the role of the husband to such an extent that they refuse to allow outsiders, particularly journalists to catch a glimpse of the wife, in case rumours of her beauty and domestic skills spread and cause envious men to seek to spirit her away. This is why they insist that all intercourse (if that's the word I want) should be only with them or at least with their blessings.

However, while the husband is away all day, it is the wife who knows the exact state of every article in the household. And while she is willing to let the husband thump his chest and brag about his achievements, she makes absolutely sure that she is the one who has the final say. Like most Indian wives, her feelings for her husband are a mixture of amusement, a giggly sort of contempt and a very real affection for the theatrical ass.

Having established this, it is time to switch similes because of another peculiar characteristic of Delhi's ministries. That, each ministry is basically equivalent to a dacoit gang and rare is the petitioner who enters one and leaves with his pockets intact. Each *babu* in each ministry is a paragon of free enterprise and sees himself as being equal to a Dhirubhai Ambani in his financial skills. Many indeed have acquired such fortunes in hard cash that business tycoons could only dream about.

To revert to the original simile, when the politician first enters a ministry he is at a certain disadvantage in that he may not have even heard of the ministry prior to his appointment. However, he is cheered by the fact that his senior bureaucrats, mostly from the IAS, will in all likelihood not know much about the ministry either. But this advantage ends quickly. Bureaucrats have other bureaucrats to guide them, as well as a lot of time to

spend reading up on the subject, besides speaking to experts to gain enough knowledge to bluff their way through. The politician, on the other hand, has very little time left from politicking. This is a situation all bureaucrats cherish. Strenuous efforts are made to speed the politician from one important engagement to another, just as an exasperated wife will urge her husband to go frolic with his buddies whenever she is fed up of him.

It is sobering to reflect on the fact that if all the ministers suddenly went on strike it would not make the slightest difference to the running of the ministries. They would amble along at their normal trundle. However, in the rare case of a minister who is sharp, knows the subject and is ruth-

less, she will borrow a bit from here, use last night's leftovers for a surprisingly appetising lunch and otherwise perform little miracles with apparently effortless ease. And that is really the job for the dedicated and sincere bureaucrat—performing little miracles daily.

The politician, in turn, has three priorities. One, make as much money as he can before he gets reshuffled into the development of human resource development. Two, persuade everyone that he is straining every nerve to make his ministry function which unfortunately is being impeded by the wicked bureaucrats. Three, do as little as is humanly possible for his constituents and other favour-seekers, while appearing to be engrossed all 24 hours in toiling to improve their life.

This last is the crux of his mission, and the wise bureaucrat recognises that he must play along here by appearing to fulfil the bizarre schemes supposedly meant to benefit the minister's constituency.

This uniquely ill-advised system seems specifically designed to impede developmental activity and is a classic instance of the blind fighting the blind. It is best illustrated by a true

from a ministry. A new minister having installed himself in his office, summoned his joint secretary and candidly asked him what he and the rest of the bureaucrats were supposed to do. Charmed by the candour of *mantri ji*, the secretary told him; "Sir, we are your memory bank. If you have any ideas whatsoever, tell us and we'll give you the pros and cons."

Visibly pleased the minister settled back into his chair. "You see," he confessed, "I am only three days old in this job and I will certainly be happy to learn from your rich fund of knowledge."

As the bureaucrat started to leave, the minister enquired, as an afterthought "Tell me," he asked, "how long have you been in this ministry?"

"One week sir," the joint secretary replied. He later swore that the minister turned pale.

There is no proof of the minister's alarm, but it is a fact that the hapless man was one of those few who were known to have actively sought a new ministry to preside over. •

## Politicians vs bureaucrats

*A classic case of the blind fighting the blind*

less about getting results, the effect can be dramatic. It is not that the bureaucracy is inherently inefficient and lethargic, it merely lacks motivation and an environment that rewards and punishes. But given the state of the institutions, it is not surprising that so little gets done, what is astonishing is that so much *does* get done.

Hence we must offer obeisance to the Indian housewife's genius for making do even during the most penurious



ILLUSTRATION DEBASHIS DEB



# The plot thickens

*A police FIR names Satish Sharma in the Sanjay Singh case*

**N**ot so long ago, it was the best of times for Capt. Satish Sharma; but now he has fallen into the worst of times. The six-month-old National Front government at the Centre is bent on fixing the aide of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. On one side his name is being dragged into the controversial Airbus A320 deal by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and, on the other, an FIR has been lodged against him in connection with the attack on Sanjay Singh, a Janata Dal leader and Prime Minister V.P. Singh's relative. Sanjay Singh was grievously injured in a shootout in former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi's constituency, Amethi, on the eve of the November parliamentary elections. In the FIR, lodged with the Munsif Ganj police station, in Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, the police has alleged that Satish Sharma was involved in a conspiracy to attack Sanjay Singh. Twenty two other persons have also been named in the report.

There was high drama on 16 May, when a team of UP police officers, accompanied by a truckload of constables, cordoned off Sharma's farmhouse at Mehrauli, on the outskirts of Delhi, in an apparent bid to arrest him. But Sharma was away in Parliament and as soon as he learnt about the happenings at home, moved Delhi High Court and managed to get anticipatory bail on a writ petition.

Till late that night, the posse of policemen lay in wait for Sharma, hoping to arrest him the moment he returned home. But, when he did finally arrive, Sharma brandished the bail order

and the police had to return empty-handed. According to Congress sources, 47 people, besides Sharma, have been implicated by the police under Section 120B of the CrPC in connection with the attack on Sanjay Singh. They include 11 Congress(I) MPs such as Ratnakar Pandey, Shiv Prasad Mishra, Harikesh Bahadur, Sibte Rizi and Alia Begam and former ministers such as M.L. Fotedar and Hans Raj Bhardwaj.

The incident took Parliament by storm the next day. Congress(I) members stalled the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and the House had to be adjourned for the day. But surprising-

ly, the UP government issued a statement on the same day saying that only Satish Sharma had been mentioned in the FIR and that no MP had been named. What was more intriguing was that home secretary Naresh Chandra and the minister of state for home affairs refused to comment on the matter on the plea that they had no knowledge of the incident. According to Sharma, who spoke to SUNDAY soon after the incident, the government was being vindictive and was trying to pin him down by any means. He says that his name was not included in the FIR filed by Sanjay Singh's personal bodyguard, who was present at the spot, and Sharma wonders why he has been named in the FIR lodged by the police subsequently.

H.R. Bharadwaj, former law minister, who took up the cudgels on behalf of Sharma in the Rajya Sabha, placed a copy of the original FIR lodged by Sanjay Singh's bodyguard on 23 November, 1989 to establish the fact that neither the name of Satish Sharma nor of any other MP had featured in it. Bharadwaj said that the guard had been with Singh for the last 11 years.

Meanwhile, the UP government is circulating stories in the press that the CID has placed its hands on evidence which suggest that Capt. Sharma was present at the spot when Singh was attacked. But the government has not been able to produce any irrefutable proof of Sharma's complicity in the matter. But then such niceties are usually dispensed with in cases of political vendetta. •

*Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi*



**Satish Sharma thinks that the government is being vindictive. He says that his name was not included in the FIR filed by Sanjay Singh's personal bodyguard but wonders why he has been named in the FIR lodged by the police subsequently**







# FEELS SO GOOD!

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GAUTAM PATOLE

## POWER OF THE PRESS

It was probably the single most influential article to appear since the National Front came to office. The day after the murder of Amir Singh, the Independent candidate in Meham, everybody expected editor Arun Shourie to tear into Devi Lal in the following day's *Indian Express*.

As it turned out,

**Rajmohan Gandhi:**  
intriguing smile



JAGDISH YADAV

**Arun Shourie:** making things happen

Shourie did launch an attack, but it was not directed at Lal. Instead, he asked his friends in the government how they could remain silent. The consequence of their apathy, he concluded severely, was that "government is not enriched by the presence of such persons. On the other hand, public discourse is impoverished by their absence."

The response was immediate. The next day,

**Rajni Kothari:** mumble, outrage, mumble



JAGDISH YADAV

veteran Gandhian L. C. Jain resigned from the Planning Commission over Meham. Professional intellectual Rajni Kothari issued a statement offering his defence. In essence, this said that he hadn't been quiet. Obviously, the rest of us had been deaf.

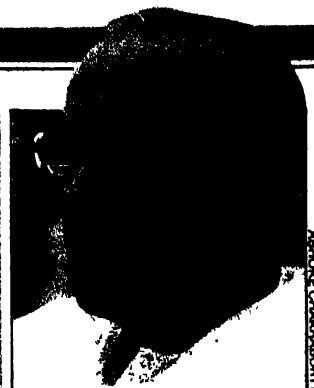
Rajmohan Gandhi was more plausible ("I am intrigued by what Mr Shourie wrote," he said with a smile) about his silence, but was also pushed into demanding Om Prakash Chautala's resignation.



**L.C. Jain:** acting according to his conscience

But the reactions were not confined to Yojana Bhavan and the India International Centre. Within the government, Shourie's article was taken as positive proof that if V.P. Singh did not defy Devi Lal and act against Chautala, he would lose all his 'respectable' friends.

When, two days later, Chautala got the chop (and Jain withdrew his resignation), it was final proof that even in these cynical days, a single article by a concerned journalist can make a difference.



ASHOK CHAKRABORTY

**Jyoti Basu:** remembering Ho

## HO HO HO CHI MINH

They may have forgotten Uncle Ho on the campuses of America where draft dodgers once chanted his name as though it was a religious mantra. But in India, Ho Chi Minh is still up there in the galaxy of world leaders along with Tito, Nehru and Nasser.

Of course, the communist parties celebrated the late Vietnamese leader's birth centenary with appropriate gusto. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu even flew to Hanoi for a ten-day state visit.

But the Government of India was not to be outdone. Foreign minister Inder Gujral unveiled a plaque honouring Ho near Nehru Place in New Delhi. A three-kilometre stretch of Outer Ring Road was also renamed Ho Chi Minh Sarani.

Of course, the National Front government was discreet. It did not follow the example of West Bengal's Marxists, who, some years ago, renamed the Calcutta street on which the American consulate is located as Ho Chi Minh Sarani!

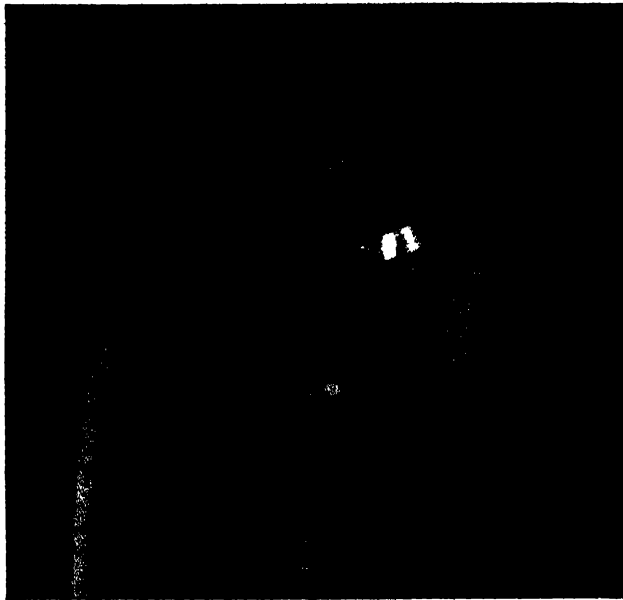


## YES, SHE KHAN KHAN

"I can't believe it," wails Parvati Khan, the sexy, hip-swaying pop-singer. "Why would anybody think that I am politically controversial?"

And yet, controversy has a way of lingering to Khan's shapely midriff. During the Rajiv Gandhi era, she was targeted by bigots at Doordarshan, who wondered how somebody called Parvati could have a surname like Khan? (The secret: it is her husband Nadeem's surname. Her maiden name is Maharaj.)

And now, says Khan,



Parvati Khan: born for controversy

NADEEM KHAN

the new government tried to sabotage a recent show in New Delhi by levying last-minute tax demands. The show, she hastens to add, was a

success, but she could have done without the aggravation.

So why do people pick on Khan? Any suggestions?

## CITY OF GOODBYE?

She's as much a part of Calcutta as Satyajit Ray, Jyoti Basu and Aparna Sen. So when rumours to the effect that Mother Teresa was leaving town made the rounds, there was widespread dismay.

Certainly, the circumstantial evidence was pretty compelling. The Mother had announced her desire to step down and the Vatican had accepted her resignation as superior-general of the Missionaries of Charity. Moreover, it



Mother Teresa: home is where the nun is

had been 37 years since she had first come to Calcutta—long enough, went the argument, for any outsider.

Except, of course, that the Albanian-born Nobel laureate is no outsider.

"My home is Nirmal Hriday in Calcutta, where I am destined to serve the dying and the destitute," the nun announced before setting off for Romania. There was no question, she said, of her ever leaving town. •

## THE MIND OF THE MAHATTENBOROUGH

And you thought the fuss over the *Gandhi* film ended when Sir Richard Attenborough beamed cannily at the Dorothy Chandler pavilion holding aloft his Best Picture Oscar!

No way. Now the Mahattenborough finds himself in the thick of another controversy. According to an agreement that *Gandhi's* producers signed with the government, five per cent of the net profits of *Gandhi* would go to-



(Above) *Gandhi*: yes, but where are the profits?; Attenborough: holy money

wards the welfare of Indian film workers.

When the film was a hit, a sum of Rs 5 crores was duly set aside for this purpose in London.

Unfortunately, it remained there for the rest of the Eighties and the film workers got nothing.

Last month, angry office-bearers of various film industry bodies made loud noises about getting the money back from London. They were countered by Sir Richard's solicitors, who made it clear that their suggestions were slanderous and that the Mahattenborough had nothing to do with the delay.

So, whose fault is it then? Currently, fingers are being pointed at that old villain, the information and broadcasting ministry, which, it is alleged, has slipped up again.



# Something in the heir

## Is Ajit Singh the Jat Rajiv Gandhi?

**I**t is not a parallel he will like but in many ways, Ajit Singh is the Jat Rajiv Gandhi. Consider the evidence:

- Like Rajiv, Singh was born into a political family: his father Chaudhary Charan Singh was a veteran *kisan* leader who became UP chief minister, Union home minister and, finally, Prime Minister.
- Like Rajiv, he opted out of politics. Rajiv joined Indian Airlines after Cambridge, Singh went to the United States and ended up working for IBM.
- Like Rajiv, he was drawn back to his destiny. Rajiv entered politics after his brother Sanjay died in a plane crash. Singh returned to India when his father's health began to fail.
- Like Rajiv, he was groomed to be heir-apparent. And just as Rajiv turned his back on many of the things his mother held so dear, so it has been with Singh. The late Chaudhary Charan Singh would have reversed the policies of industrialisation. As industries minister, however, Ajit Singh has been every inch the IBM-trained technocrat.

From then on, it gets more complicated. There is one obvious difference, of course. Rajiv became Prime Minister, had his accession sanctified by a sycophantic and spineless party and then won the largest mandate in Indian history. Ajit has not had it so easy. Even while Charan Singh was ailing, H.N. Bahuguna, an old political rival (who the Chaudhary had once called a KGB agent) who had just joined the Lok Dal made it clear that he regarded Ajit as an upstart. The Lok Dal split into two and the Bahuguna faction (Lok Dal-B) did a lot better than Singh's lot (Lok Dal-A).

At the time, this did not seem like such a big deal. The Jat farmers of the Hindi heartland who were Charan Singh's natural constituency were unlikely to accept Bahuguna for long. But that analysis ignored the Devi Lal factor. It took the wily Haryana strongman less than two months to marginalise Bahuguna and emerge as the *de facto* leader of the Lok Dal (B).

After Lal led the party to a landslide victory in the 1987 Haryana Assembly elections (while the Lok Dal-

A's candidates bit the dust), it became clear that he—not Ajit—had inherited Chaudhary Charan Singh's mantle. And when Bahuguna died a year or so later, nobody even noticed.

**SO, IF** Rajiv Gandhi is the heir who got it all—and probably threw it away; then Ajit Singh is the heir who was left out in the cold.

After the Haryana debacle, he was left with a not inconsiderable support base in UP and this became his ticket for admission (merger is the term he preferred) into Chandra Shekhar's Janata Party. That grouping joined the Janata Dal, which became a constituent of the National Front, and that is how Ajit has ended up as industries minister in this Cabinet.

The Rajiv Gandhi parallels, however, continue to haunt him. His detractors still portray him as a man who is ill at ease in the hurly-burly of cow belt politics. There are innumerable stories about him baffling grassroots workers by saying things like "What you have got is zilch" and he is said to be uncomfortable with the ruthless deal-making that is the hallmark of Jat politics.

Like Rajiv, he also has a reputation for being easily impressed by everyone he speaks to. Two years ago, SUNDAY christened him the 'flip-flop man of the Opposition' and the tag has stuck. Ajit has changed loyalties so often that nobody is really sure if he can count on him. Chandra Shekhar is still bitter about being abandoned at a crucial stage in his battle against Hegde. And Devi Lal's relations with Ajit resemble nothing as much as a roller-coaster ride. During the first Meham election, Ajit put Chautala on the spot by visiting the constituency and professing outrage over the violence. That little drama contributed

to the crisis which led to Devi Lal's resignation.

This time, however, he has held his peace and the general feeling is that he is now on Devi Lal's side. The day after the murder of the Independent candidate in Meham, the Chaudhary made a great show of going over to Ajit's office and asking him for his help.

**REGARDLESS OF** whether Ajit and Devi Lal continue to be buddies over the next few weeks, it is clear that their's is a relationship that cannot endure. Their bases are

too similar; Ajit regards Lal as having stolen his father's inheritance from under his nose and the Chaudhary does not trust him.

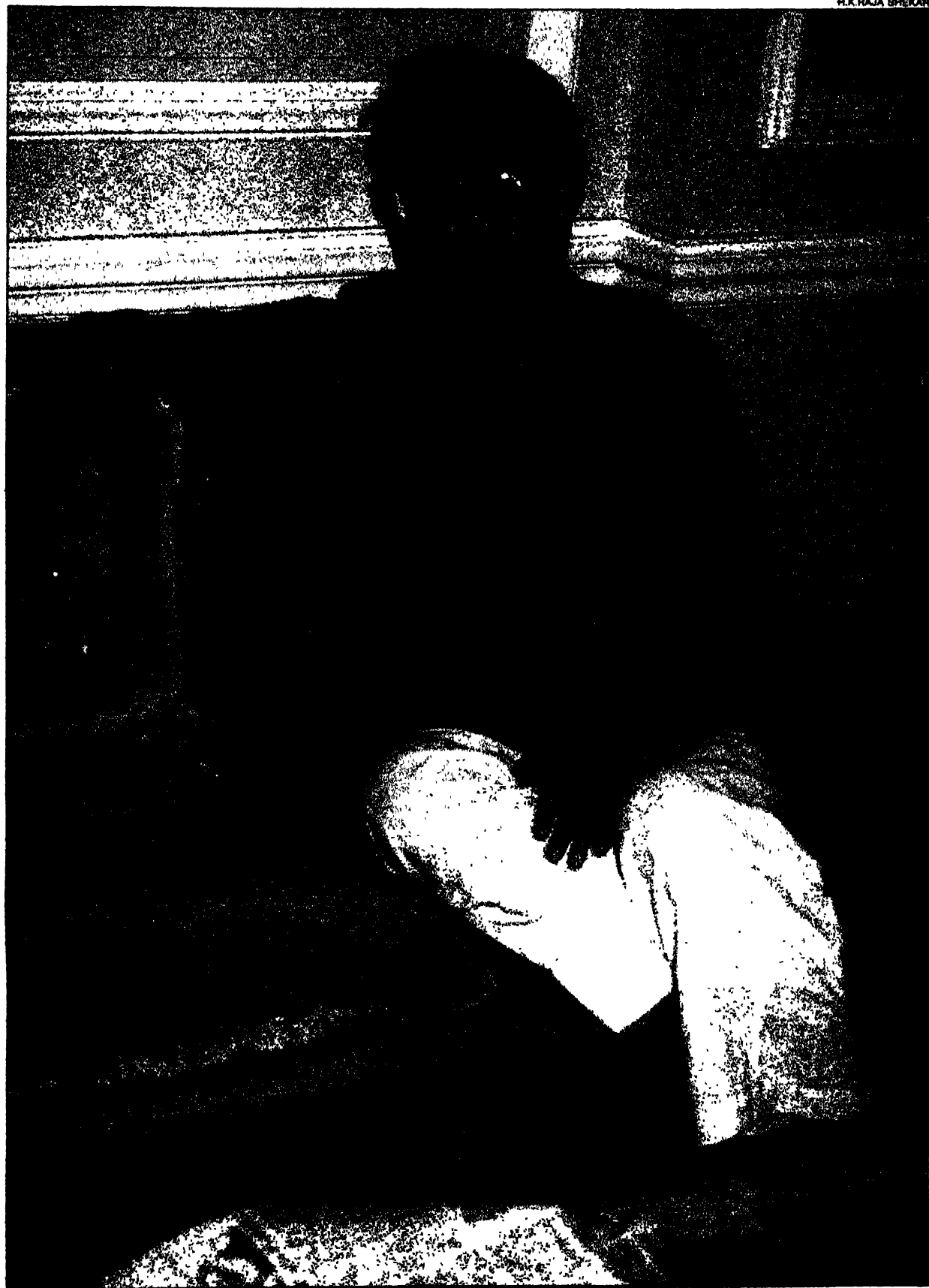
Nor can Ajit and Shekhar be friends in the long run: memories of the old betrayal still linger. Logically, Ajit should be able to make common cause with the Raja. Except that the chemistry between the two men is all wrong and they remain deeply suspicious of each other.

That leaves Arun Nehru. And over the last few weeks, Singh and Nehru have grown closer than ever before. It is a relationship that remains worth watching.



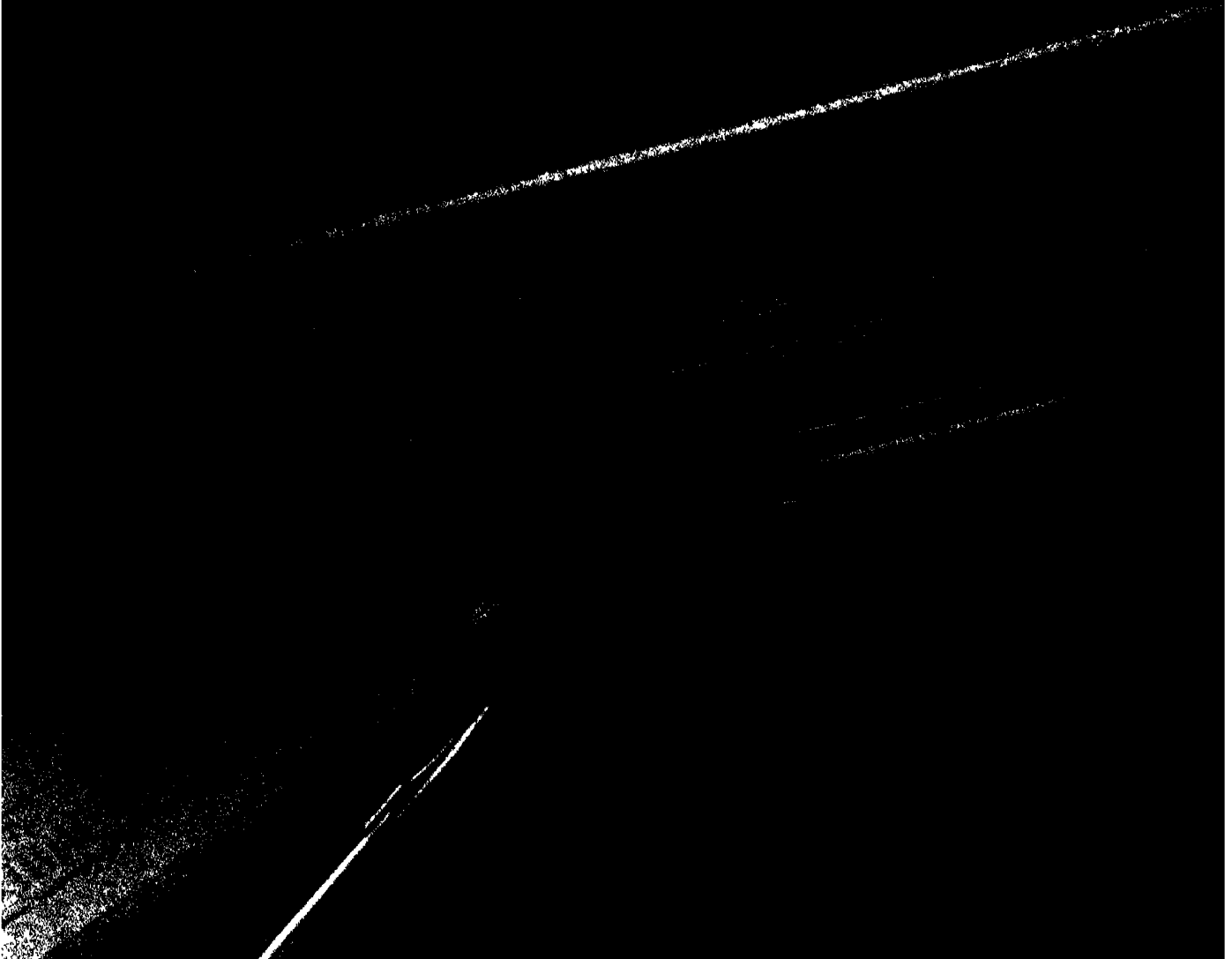
**If Rajiv Gandhi is the heir who got it all—and probably threw it away; then Ajit Singh is the heir who was left out in the cold**







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1111

Is this tag on your bag?

VIP



PERSONALITY/COMPANIES

# The literary boxwallah

*Procter & Gamble's Gurcharan Das—portrait of an artist as managing director*

The Managing Director almost tripped over Arjun

'Excuse me,' said Arjun stepping back.

The Managing Director looked at him and said, 'Not your fault, I should be looking where I am going. My name is Billumoria.'

'I know,' said Arjun. 'You are the Managing Director. I was introduced to you along with other trainees two months ago. My name is Arjun.'

The MD's eyes widened

'Will you please come into my office?'

Arjun followed him. Billumoria's office was cool, dark and spacious. The walls were panelled in wood, and there was a thick carpet on the floor. At the back was a window overlooking the harbour. On the desk Arjun noticed a copy of the proposal he had penned the previous night.

'So you are the young man who wants us to sell Bombay Balm for...let me see... for headaches.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good. We'll do it. But you will have to do it.'

'But sir, I have just been fired from the company this morning.'

'What!'

'Mr Rajan called me this morning and said that I need not return from tomorrow.'

'Get me Rajan on the line,' Billumoria told his secretary on the intercom. 'Hello! Yes, Rajan, what is this about the young trainee Arjun?'

'Why? Asks too many questions? No, let's keep him. Transfer him to advertising... and Rajan, next time you find a per-

son who asks too many questions, send him to me before you fire him...'

...The Advertising Manager, whose name was Choudhary, was delighted to have him.

'He's the most refreshing thing to walk through these doors in years,' he said.

'After he relaunched the balm,' said Billumoria, 'he should naturally return to complete his sales training...give him plenty of rope...he's a bit odd, but creative. And watch him...two years from now he might have your job.'

It is probably every management trainee's dream to be reinstated by his managing director, after being fired by his immediate superior. But it takes a trainee and a managing director who think like Gurcharan Das to make it possible. And a book by Das to bring the situation to life.

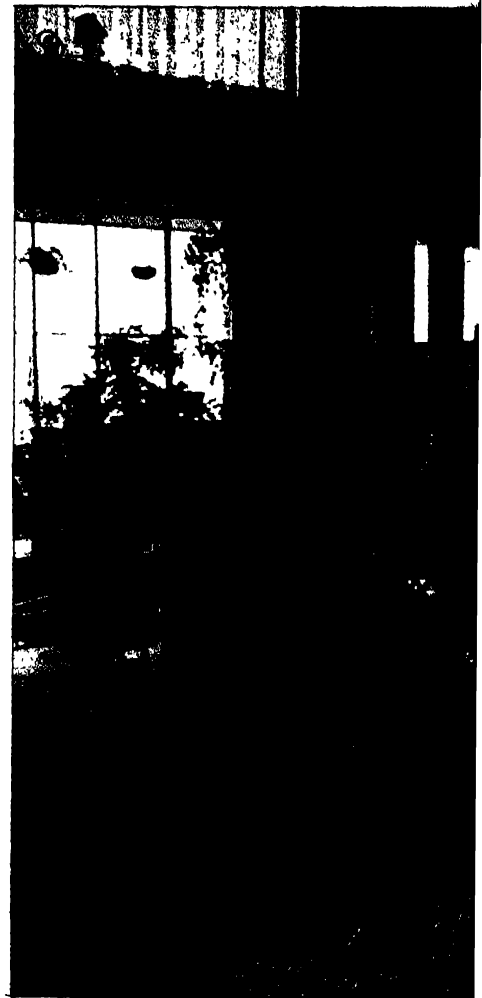
It is only natural that Gurcharan Das would create a character like Arjun in his new book, *A Fine Family*. Like Das, Arjun's family

comes from Lyallpur, now in Pakistan. Like Das, Arjun is unusual, thinks differently and refreshingly, working his way around problems without caring about conventions and an eccentric's label. Like Das, Arjun is successful, works for a consumer products company in Bombay. But unlike Arjun, Das is the president and managing director of Procter & Gamble India Ltd(P&G), a company he is attempting to

turn around from a conservative outfit with sales of Rs 66.54 crores last year to a Rs 500 crore consumer products powerhouse within the next five years.

"But it won't be a cakewalk," says Das. P&G has Hindustan Lever Ltd (HLL)—its direct competitor—to take on. Both companies have consumer products ambitions, but HLL is way ahead. Its Rs 1323 crore turnover is 20 times P&G's, with a market reach far wider, and far more solidly entrenched than P&G can handle—at least right now. Adding to HLL's clout are the three companies under its wing: Lipton, Brooke Bond and Pond's India, which together brings the Lever sales leverage to Rs 2,440 crores. And growing.

Predictably, Das' projection of almost a ten-fold rise in his company's operations—with a Rs 300 crore export component—has come in for criticism, especially the point that it is virtually impossible for any company to grow so rapidly in so short a time.



**"My job," says Das, "is to talk big. It is important to hold out a vision to the people who are working with me..."**





One way out for P&G would be to introduce products sold worldwide by its parent company, US-based Procter & Gamble International

The behemoth, with annual sales of US \$ 21.4 billion, has a 120 product package—including such well-known brands as Camay soap, Head & Shoulders shampoo, the Cover Girl range of cosmetics, the Vidal Sassoon range of toiletries, Tide detergent (if introduced in India, a direct competitor to HLL's Surf), Crest toothpaste (vs Lever's Close Up) and Pampers diapers, among others. P&G India recently introduced the Whisper brand of high-priced sanitary napkins, a product in the corporate entity's worldwide range of offerings. This launch perhaps indi-


cates P&G India's game-plan over the next few years. A difficult and ambitious one.

"My job," says Das, "is to talk big. It is important to hold out a vision to the people who are working with me. If you have low standards,

dies and becoming a don by joining Richardson Vicks Inc. (RVI) in 1964. And stayed on. Says Das. "I ended up in business by accident, like the man who came to dinner and stayed on." By the time he was 27, Das was RVI's youngest

ever marketing director. "The company," recalls Das with a smile, "thought I was much too young to be on the board." Das left RVI soon after, to look after its Spanish operations for General Foods.

But he was lured back by RVI in 1981, to head its sluggish Indian subsidiary, Richardson Hindustan Ltd. (RHL). "There was a real mess (in RHL)," says Das. "The company was cash poor, morale was low, turnover in the management ranks very high.

|  <b>PROCTER &amp; GAMBLE INDIA LTD</b> |       |       |       |       |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| FINANCIAL POSITION (Rs in crores)                                                                                         |       |       |       |       |       |
|                                                                                                                           | YEAR  |       |       |       |       |
|                                                                                                                           | 1985  | 1986  | 1987  | 1988  | 1989  |
| <b>GROSS FIXED ASSETS</b>                                                                                                 | 10.18 | 11.71 | 13.00 | 14.12 | 17.80 |
| <b>NET FIXED ASSETS</b>                                                                                                   | 5.64  | 6.32  | 5.99  | 7.26  | 9.99  |
| <b>SHARE CAPITAL</b>                                                                                                      | 3.71  | 3.71  | 3.71  | 3.71  | 6.68  |
| <b>NET WORTH</b>                                                                                                          | 6.54  | 8.01  | 10.21 | 14.07 | 18.32 |





**Gurcharan Das: at home manager**

And because of governmental price control, the management for years had stressed volume-selling at any price and producing at any cost. I can tell you, it was a difficult homecoming for me." The company was growing slowly, at just over 10 per cent a year, compared to the industry average (taking companies such as Warner Hindustan, Pfizer, Colgate-Palmolive, Ponds, HMM Ltd, among others) of over 15 per cent.

By 1984, RHL's net profit had almost doubled to Rs 92 lakhs, and sales had jumped 50 per cent to Rs 23.3 crores. With the company on the road to recovery, Das prepared to launch a new range of products. Though Vicks Vaporub continued to be its dominant product, others such as Formula 44 cough syrup, Formula 44 lozenges and Vicks Action 500 tablets hit the market. Vicks herbal cough drops were test-marketed, and Vicks inhalers were to be backed by increased advertising support. Clearasil, RHL's skin care product, increased three times in market prices, but held on to its market share. And to

capitalise on a slot already created by Clearasil, the company went into soaps and medicated cleansers.

Then, keeping pace with the newly-emerging international trend in mega-mergers to expand reach, sales and the bottomline, Procter & Gamble International acquired RVI. RHL changed its name to P&G to reflect the deal, Das stayed on as MD, and the company began to reorient itself to a brand new corporate culture—Das

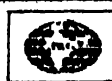
whether P&G is able to deliver the goods in the face of "environment expectations", he says, is irrelevant, because "performance has to be weighed against commitment of resources and marketing objectives".

There is no doubting Das' objectives, he has spelled them out often enough—to make P&G a top-ranking outfit in the country. And he is using the resources in his own way. Informality at work (it is hardly poss-

style. A "tremendous opportunity" to work with, as the author-manager puts it.

Only, if the opportunity translates into results—and that has already happened to an extent—P&G, and Das, are home and dry. Says one of Das' colleagues, who has been with the company for almost ten years: "The speculation (in addition to P&G International's product entry) is also a result of P&G's high profile nature. And to some extent, this is Gurcharan's contribution to the company. He is basically a manager of his environment and a good media person." But

ible to be intimidated by a boss who is as comfortable in his designer *churidar-kurtas* as he is in charcoal grey suits), encouraging frank opinion, and urging junior executives (shades of Arjun?) to contribute to the corporation. Says his colleague: "Gurcharan has a disarmingly different style which is poles apart from the *han-jee-saab* and I-am-the-boss approach that most Indian managers flaunt." He adds: "Prior to 1980, it was an autocratic company. But after Gurcharan's arrival on the scene, it's more open, more informal. There is a younger crowd and they have the freedom to choose how they are



## PROCTER & GAMBLE INDIA LTD

### FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS (Rs in crores)

|                              | YEAR  |       |       |       |       |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                              | 1985  | 1986  | 1987  | 1988  | 1989  |
| <b>SALES</b>                 | 32.68 | 37.19 | 45.71 | 51.81 | 65.44 |
| <b>EARNINGS (BEFORE TAX)</b> | 6.03  | 5.31  | 6.09  | 6.40  | 8.02  |
| <b>EARNINGS (AFTER TAX)</b>  | 1.93  | 2.96  | 3.79  | 4.68  | 6.26  |
| <b>DIVIDEND PAYMENTS</b>     | 1.30  | 1.48  | 1.67  | 1.86  | 2.00  |

Compared to Hindustan Lever Ltd, P&G is way behind its consumer durable dream in India, but P&G executives hint at an expansion that could raise turnover to Rs 500 crores by 1995, almost a ten-fold jump.



to achieve their work objectives. It's only in the strategic areas that Das gets involved, the other areas he leaves to departmental heads once he is convinced about their competence."

On a typical working day, Das charges all over the company's central Bombay offices, to the finance director or the personnel director's office when he wants a certain report, instead of sending notes down through the appropriate channels. "I believe in doing things with a degree of intensity," says Das. "When I am an executive, that's all I think about."

And typically, when he is not working, the last thing he thinks about is

work. Like in the mornings, when he shuns newspapers to listen to Bach or Kishori Amonkar in his swank Pedder Road apartment. Or like when he wrote a play, *Larins Sahib*, which was produced in Bombay two decades ago. Or *Mira*, another play, which had an off-Broadway premiere in New York. And sometimes, he does not even write at home. He writes at airports, while waiting for delayed flights. That is how he wrote *A Fine Family*, a novel which took him six years to put together. Arjun has come a long way.

• **Sudeep Chakravarti and Adite Chatterjee/Bombay**

## SHIPPING

# Storm warning

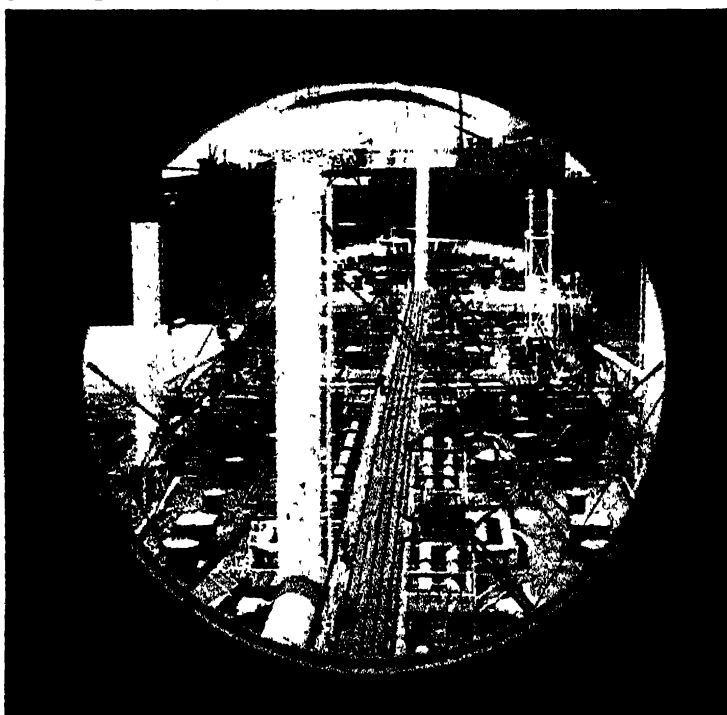
*Indian sailors queue up to join foreign companies, throwing the country's shipping operations in disarray*

**T**he volatile fluctuations that threatened to cripple global shipping in the mid-Seventies and the early Eighties are a nightmare that even hardened sea-dogs do not want to talk about—certainly not experience again. Now, the global depression has lifted, but in India, the shipping industry appears to be listing still.

It is not only tonnage that is worrying Indian shipping, but the fact that increasing numbers of sailors are moving on to foreign shipping lines, seriously hampering their operations. According to industry estimates, more than a hundred ship days (a ship day indicates the time a vessel is under contract to deliver goods, after leaving the home port) were lost this January, by a dozen lines. The Shipping Corp. of India (SCI), the country's largest line, alone lost 70 ship days.

Indian ship owners had foreseen this trouble. Early last year, line owners and shipping agents had tried to impose self-regulatory measures to check the outflow of sailors. A committee

**The Indian shipping industry: starved of tonnage, government patronage and now, sailors**



GAUTAM PATOLE

was formed by the directorate general of shipping with the sole purpose of stopping the hiring of Indian sailors by foreign shipping lines. The move, obviously, did not work.

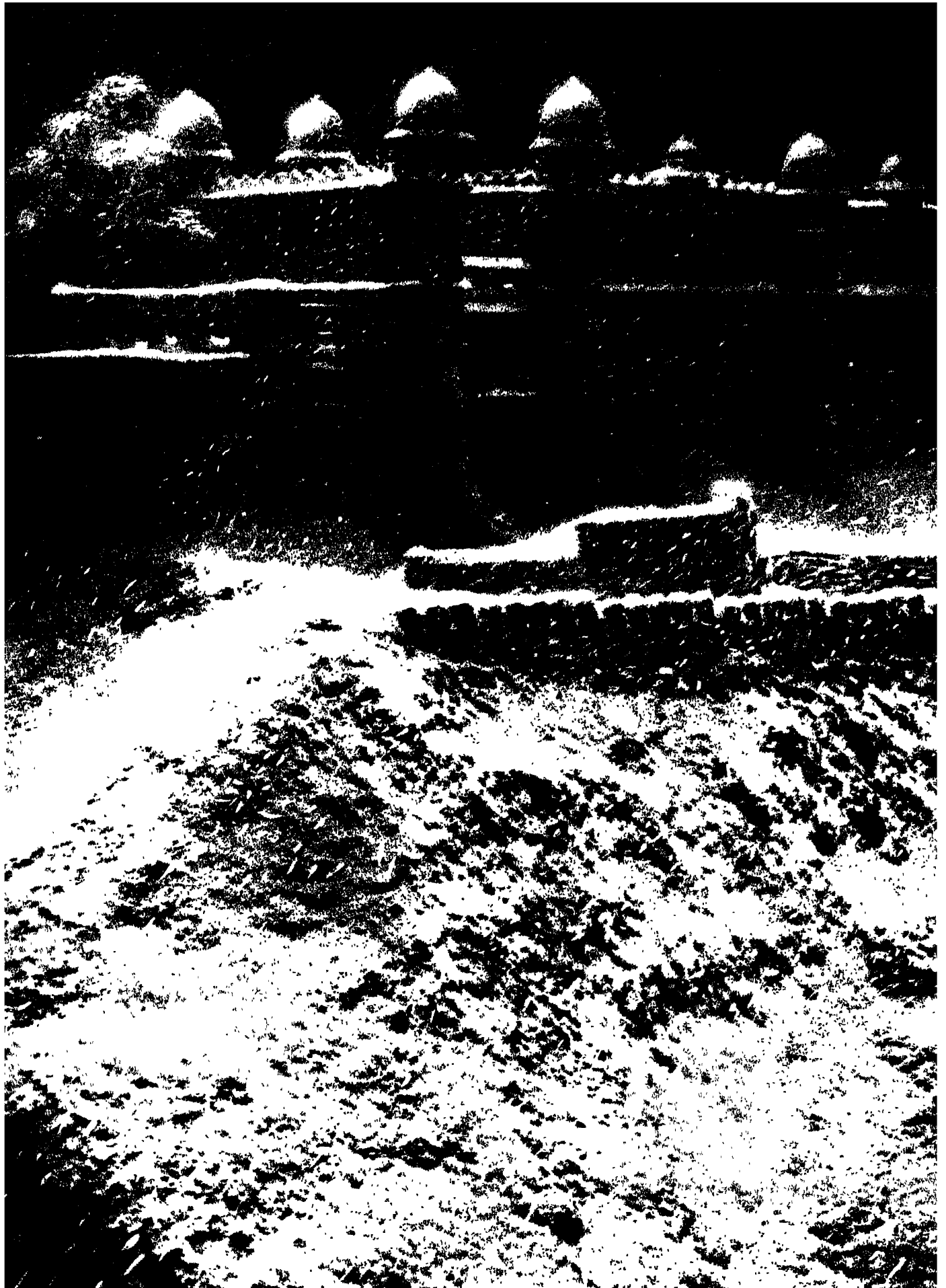
With reason. Indian sailors sailing on foreign ships make more than three times their counterparts do with domestic companies. A captain's salary is a good example of the disparity. A captain on a foreign ship easily makes US \$ 2,500 a month, and this is a conservative estimate. If he chooses to cash in his pay on the Indian black market—as is often the case—he could clean up Rs 55,000 or more, depending on the current premium. A captain sailing an Indian ship makes an average of Rs 7,500 per month, after taxes and other deductions.

"A man must be stupid," says Dharendra Kumar, a chief officer with Barber Shipping, an American company, where he makes US \$ 2,300 a month, "if he does not want to make good money. I have been sailing with Barber for three years, and having had a taste of that, I would never want to sail with an Indian company for a long period of time." In India to study for his master's ticket (a certificate to become captain with independent command of a ship), Kumar says he will continue to work with a foreign company afterwards. Why? "Let me tell you a story," he continues. "I was with SCI in 1985, but after I

finished my second mate's (number three in a ship's command structure) ticket, they told me to report back in 1991. They told me that there was no place for me. Now what was I supposed to do? Drown myself in the Indian Ocean?"

Even sailors who are well settled with Indian lines, often have a nagging thought or two about working for a foreign company. Says Hyderabad-based Shantiswaroop Lele, a captain with Varun Shipping, among the top ten of the country's lines: "Of course I have thought about the money factor, but right in the beginning I was decided against it. Maybe I did the wrong thing." He adds: "This









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financial year (ending 31 March, 1990) I had to pay income tax to the tune of Rs 66,000. I had to invest something like Rs 40,000 to bring my income tax level down to Rs 36,000. Look at the amount of money stuck. I could have certainly invested this money elsewhere."

Abroad, perhaps. Indian Shipping Registry records show that there are enough trained sailors in India to man a thousand ships. But the country has only 400 ocean-going vessels. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that sailors move out—currently, Indian sailors work on almost 700 ships of foreign registration. There has been such an outflow, that only 300 Indian ships can be manned today, keeping 100 more or less idle. The only way the government, and the country's maritime companies can lure them

back is by offering better salaries and perquisites. The sailor's unions have been battling the problem, but the benefits presently offered simply do not appear to be attractive enough.

**T**he Maritime Union of India (MUI), for example, has been suggesting for the past two decades that sailors, by virtue of their being away from the country's shore for long stretches of time (six months to a year) be granted NRI (non-resident Indian) status. Bureaucratic procrastination led to a stalemate, but the MUI did not let up its pressure. Finally, on 16 May this year, finance minister Madhu Dandavate announced that Indian sailors would now be treated as NRIs and be exempt from income tax. This was a welcome break for the sailors, and an industry already crippled by sailo-



**Capt. Shantiswaroop Lele:** "Right in the beginning I decided against (money). Maybe I did the wrong thing."

desertion, besides overbearing debt and slipping cargo tonnage. The earlier logic was that an Indian ship meant Indian territory, therefore a sailor on an Indian ship—even one sailing in foreign waters—was technically always in India.

Says K.E. Sukhia, MUI's general secretary: "It is a good breakthrough." He adds, however, that

"there are problems that have to be overcome. Now, after the finance minister's announcement, Indian sailors on ships who do not exceed the 183-day stay in the country (India) will automatically be treated as NRIs. But the problem is with the sailors of the same companies who are coasting (sailing on ships which travel from one Indian port to another, Kandla to Madras, for example). They will not be able to enjoy the NRI status. Personnel on off-shore supply vessels will suffer the same fate. I guess the shipping companies will have to rotate their people to solve this problem. Otherwise, the coasters (ships on trips between Indian ports) will have nobody to run them."

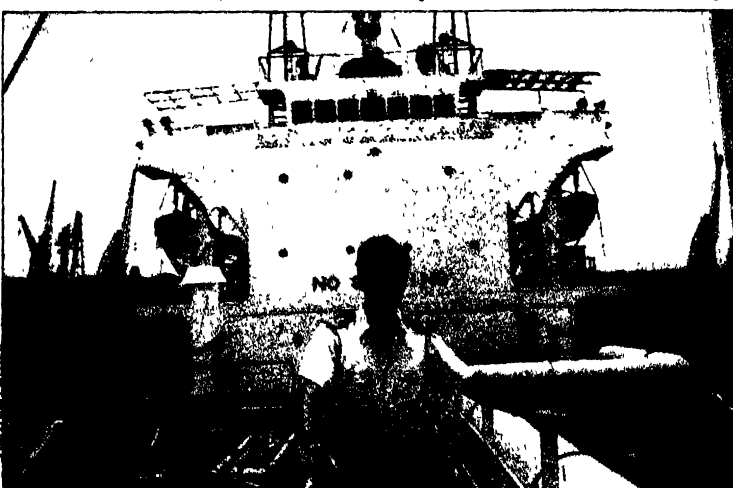
Today, the coasters comprise almost 30 per cent of the Indian fleet. The crew on these vessels are as important

—for example, to handle increasing domestic oil traffic—to the Indian economy as ocean-going ones. "This is a problem that will have to be solved fast," says Sukhia. "But even with this new NRI status, the outflow of Indian sailors is not going to stop. Even after the proposed wage hike for officers that we are fighting for comes through, our sailors will still be paid

much less than sailors on foreign ships."

The general expectation is that once the hike comes through, in a month's time, according to industry sources, an Indian captain should get around Rs 35,000 a month—on paper. There are chances, say senior MUI officials, that by the time negotiations end with the government and shipping companies, the figure could well be reduced to Rs 20,000. This sentiment bears out Sukhia's comments.

**Dhirendra Kumar:** "A man must be stupid if he doesn't want money"

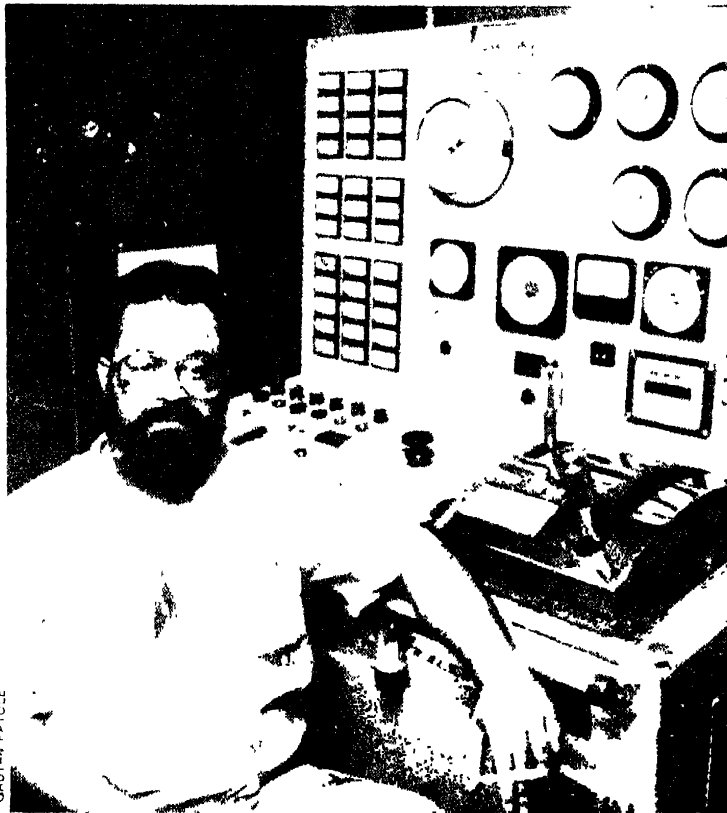




If it happens, it will only add to the problems that already plague the Indian shipping industry. During the worldwide industry depression, maritime giants such as UK, Norway and Greece lost many of their men to the slump. Many sailors simply gave up sailing because their companies could not pay them well enough. They exchanged their sea legs for shore jobs, tired of waiting for the depression to end. The slump was so disastrous that even training of personnel was put on hold. When the clouds lifted, these Western companies were desperately short of crew, and looked to the "cheap Asian" market to fill the vacancies. Only, what is cheap for them, is a major attraction for Indian—and other South Asian sailors.

And Sukhia, despite his talk of a "breakthrough" in the government's attitude, is loath to admit this. But he eventually does, frankly, there is no other option. Says he: "No deal that we make (with the government or other agencies) will keep them (the sailors) back. The situation here has become dangerous and erratic."

In its Eighth Plan manoeuvrings—or meanderings, as the case may be—the government has formed a high level working group for the shipping industry, which is looking into financial outlays, requirement of tonnage (simply put, more ships) for replacement and hiring recruits. "But all this will work out to nought," says Vasant Sheth, chairman of Great Eastern Shipping, perhaps the only Indian company to stay afloat in the depression. "If our people continue to go over to the other side, we are doomed. If drastic steps are not taken to keep our manpower here, Indian shipping may come to a standstill. What is



Gurudutt Kuchinad: "The whole system (in India) is screwed up"

the use of training new people? They will switch sides in the future."

Sheth adds that an attendant problem is that Indian shipping companies are too fragile. "Their debt-equity ratios are extremely high," he says. "Now with our manpower drifting away, the government, I feel is just adding to their problems by deciding to bail out the sick shipping companies, by taking on the responsibility of repaying the loans that exceed Rs 150 crores." According to Sheth, these are badly managed companies, and they will remain that way. And if

the financial situation gets worse, he says, how will these companies ever match the salaries that their foreign counterparts so readily offer? "Let's face it," says Sheth. "A sailor has to decide between lolly and security. There are thousands of sailors from all over India who are leaving."

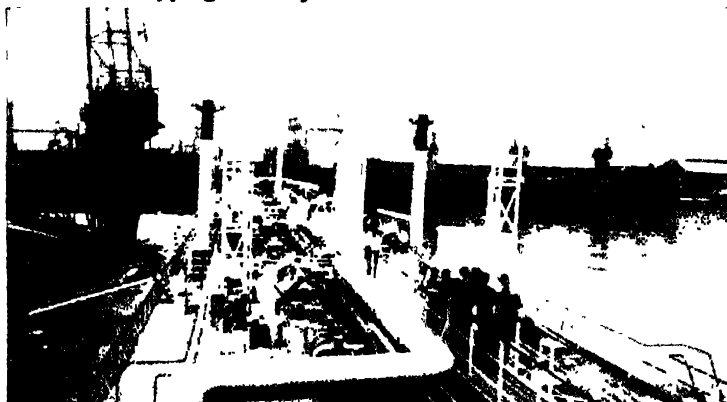
He argues that if a ship is not manned by good people, it obviously cannot be well maintained, and this leads to huge revenue losses. Besides repair and equipment breaking down, the market today is so competitive that getting cargo can sometimes be a problem if a ship is poorly looked after. US oil giants such as Shell and Esso, for example, often send their representatives to check out a ship before chartering it. Expectedly, Indian ships are low on their list.

Says Gurudutt Kuchinad, a second engineer, who wishes to retain his company's anonymity: "The conditions here are bad, and I don't have to tell you that the Indian rupee has no value. What I do not understand is this: Indian companies pay you poorly, but they charge the same international freight rates. The whole system is screwed up." He adds: "I am going to sail according to what my conscience tells me. Right now, I do not have plans to join a foreign company. But in the future, who knows?"

Nobody is sure about the industry's future, but they already have an inkling about what Kuchinad and seamen like Capt Lele and chief officer Kumar think. Says Sheth, a little mournfully: "Our floating manpower is floating away. What we need to do is throw in a hook that is worth its weight in dollars. Only then will the fish bite. Otherwise, we will be sunk—hook, line and tanker." •

Godfrey Pereira/  
Bombay

The Indian shipping industry: bleak future



GAUTAM PATOLE



## FINANCE

# The money killers

*Mismanagement and terrorists have shattered Punjab's booming finance companies*

**O**n either side of the Grand Trunk Road in Amritsar, especially near the city's main bus terminus, every other building has bright satin flags flying from the rooftops. They proclaim names of various finance companies—Majitha Finance Co., Prabhat Finance & Investment Ltd, Sazda Finance Co., Batala Finance, Bhullar Finance, the list goes on. What they offer investors is the same thing, quick returns on their money.

The finance business in Punjab began in 1975, but really took off a decade later, thanks mainly to Rajwans Singh Dhillon, an enterprising Life Insurance Corp. employee and the owner of Prabhat Finance & Investment Ltd. Dhillon's scheme was simple. If someone was to deposit, say a sum of Rs 20,000 with Prabhat, he would be assured a monthly income of Rs 600. In addition, he would become the company's 'agent', in turn getting other people to deposit Rs 20,000 each, who would then become agents. An ever-increasing network. All a person had to do to get out was give the company two months notice, and he would get back his initial deposit plus outstanding interest payments. No strings attached.

The formula worked. Within five years, the modest business started by Prabhat changed the complexion of rural investments in Punjab. Seeing Dhillon's success, other entrepreneurs followed suit, and today, there are 128 registered finance companies in the state. Investors poured in, lured by easy returns and incentives—some took home cars, motorcycles or music systems, and drew more 'agents' into the trade. Prabhat today boasts 26,000 'employees', Sazda 17,000 and Majitha 13,000. And the estimated total

investment in all the companies is at an incredible Rs 1,000 crores. In time, the finance companies were granted licenses to operate in Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, spreading their tentacles all over north India.

The effect in Punjab was the most dramatic. Residents of Butakalan village in Amritsar district, for example, boast that locals have invested more than Rs one crore in finance companies. The craze was so overpowering that farmers sold their land and jewellery to invest in these companies. They even took out their fixed deposits from banks. Says a Butakalan resident, who declines to be identified: "There are two ration shops but ten offices of finance companies here."

But now, the bubble has burst.

For the people of Butakalan, and other villages and towns of Punjab, they would have perhaps been better off with more ration shops. There is a sinister reason.

The authorities realised it too late, but it was perhaps natural that along with the eager villagers and townspeople of Punjab, the state's hounded terrorists would wake up to the presence of finance companies. The militants were desperate to somehow take on a respectable garb, and these provided ideal cover—along with a job, companies such as Prabhat would also issue the 'agent' an identity card. These became the terrorists' passport to a decent, above-the-ground life. More importantly, it allowed them to go about their deadly business with a simple trick. Everytime identity cards were flashed at police checkpoints or in the presence



of *naka*, or raiding parties, they were let off.

Besides an identity scam, terrorists could easily deposit their lakhs of rupees—if not crores—to procure arms with finance companies. Banks were dangerous, with finance companies, no questions were asked.

**T**he police got wind of the terrorist-financier links towards the end of last year. Interrogating arrested terrorists provided the first clues. Then, identity cards were found on the person of a few militants killed in encounters with the police, and many members of terrorists' families, when they were brought in for questioning. Some instances:

- Two top terrorists, Mahal Singh and Kulwant "Cashier" Singh, were killed in a police encounter last year. Their wives were taken for questioning by Batala district's senior superintendent of police (SSP) Gobind Ram. Both

**Finance companies closing down could throw Punjab's employment pattern out of gear and even affect the state's rural economy**





**Investors outside the closed Prabhat Finance building: duped, broke and furious.**

ladies were Prabhat Finance 'employees'

- On 1 February this year, the police had an encounter on the Grand Trunk Road near Amritsar with three militants, who were escaping after kidnapping a goldsmith. Two of them were killed in the shootout that followed. The third, Parminder Singh, was carrying an identity card issued by the NIC Finance Co.

- Militants had used a young girl as a decoy to lure a communist worker, Hardev Singh (see *SUNDAY* 20-26 May). Hardev was beheaded by terrorists, but the girl, Jasmit Kaur, was later captured by the police. It was discovered that she was the secretary to the managing director of Amritsar-based Rehmat Finance Co.

There is a problem, besides the terrorists, which has speeded up the col-

lapse of the financing business in Punjab. About the same time the police was looking into the terrorist angle of the business, 'employees' of numerous companies began to complain about malpractices, mainly, non-payment of dues. Says Sanjiv Gupta, Amritsar's SSP "The buck had to stop somewhere." Adds Sarabjit Singh, deputy commissioner of Amritsar district "These schemes were aimed at exploiting the unemployed and they succeeded in doing so."

**T**he first to disappear—ironically—was Dhillon, owner of pace-setting Prabhat Finance. A month and a half back, the police received intelligence reports that Dhillon was planning to flee the country. By the time they got into the act, Dhillon had already closed the shutters of his op-

eration. (Police officials do not admit it, but there is speculation that Dhillon is presently under illegal detention in Amritsar.)

Everyday since, a crowd of irate investors have staged protests outside the building they called their 'office'. Some of them had invested as much as Rs 50,000-80,000 in Prabhat. "We want our money back," screams Sukhdev Singh, an 'agent'. "If the government does not help us we will take violent action." Demands Jaswant Singh, another Prabhat 'agent': "If they (the government) can't do anything now, they why did they give licenses to the companies?"

Prabhat's closure created a domino effect in the market, and owners of other finance companies began to go underground, both out of fear of terrorist links and fiscal mismanagement. The second large company to close down was Sazda. Many other companies stopped making payments. Says one 'agent', who declines to be identified. "The government does not give us jobs. If they don't get us our money we too will become terrorists."

This is a chilling statement. Says Sarabjit Singh, the deputy commissioner "This is a fiscal offence, and the law is helpless because these are all voluntary investments. However, we are hopeful of recovering 50-60 per cent of the monies." He adds that he is relieved the business has collapsed before the harvesting season. Otherwise, he says, "villagers might have lost hundreds of crores more" in their post-harvest, cash-flush euphoria.

However, investors could be in deeper trouble, and so could Punjab. Government officials say that numerous villagers have "begged and borrowed" money from relatives and friends, and now they are afraid to return home. Moreover, if the lakhs of finance company 'employees' are all out of 'jobs', it could throw the entire state's employment pattern out of gear. It could even—though marginally, say officials—affect Punjab's rural economy.

Gupta, the Amritsar SSP, says one way out of the mess could be to seize assets and freeze the bank accounts held by owners of the finance companies, most of whom are on the run. This is likely to be a long, trying process during which the situation could deteriorate further. Which is a pity, really. Punjab, and its people, have enough problems on their hands already. •

**Ritu Sarin/Amritsar**



## ■ Advantage HTA

That's it, then Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA) Ltd is the undisputed number one of the Indian advertising industry. For 1989, the company chalked up Rs 101.18 crores in billings, with Lintas India coming in second with less than Rs 95 crores. This settles the long-standing battle between the two companies (remember the billings war from a year ago, when both outfits



**HTA's P. K. Khanna: leading the pack**

claimed the top slot, cleverly juggling statistics for victory?) This time round, HTA billings are independent, without its subsidiary companies, Contract Advertising and Indian Public Affairs Network chipping in with their billings. HTA had generally led the pack; it was also the first ad agency to hit the Rs 50 crore mark in the 1986-87 financial year. Besides an increasingly fat bottomline for HTA—more than doubling its billings in a couple of years—what is really heartening is the rapidly increasing bottomline for almost all major—and numerous minor—ad firms. Consumerism is here to stay, and it can't survive without ad support.

## STOCK QUOTE

**When Dhirubhai's expenditure on advertising exceeded a certain limit, he started Mudra. When his engineering expenses went up, he took over L & T. But why is he starting a newspaper? The same kind of reasoning.**

*A rival industrialist on the proposed Ambani paper*

## ■ Citi dining

Citicorp owns Diners Club International. But in India, the Diners operation was always an independent—though not an entirely trouble-free—one. Not anymore. Last week, Citibank chief executive for India, Jaitirth "Jerry" Rao announced that his bank was taking over the Diners franchise in India, and moving its base from Bombay to Madras. The move will add more of a punch to the aggressive bank's consumer services business, and will give it an opportunity to take on the competition; ANZ Grindlays Bank, for instance, already has a thriving credit card business, with a Visa

link-up. Citibank's takeover is complete, with the Reserve Bank of India nodding a yes to the franchise transfer, which is expected to cost the bank Rs seven crores. Along with the credit card business comes the comfortable Diners Club Pvt. Ltd turnover of almost Rs 100 crores.



**Jerry Rao: the new Diners India boss**

## COMPANY OF THE WEEK

### Tata Tea Ltd



• It couldn't have been a better year for Tata Tea Ltd. Sales have increased by Rs 70 crores in the year-ended March 1990, over the past year. And profits have more than doubled to Rs 41.49 crores. The company is taking over Consolidated Coffee Ltd, a cash-rich Bangalore-based company (final government approval is awaited) and has a hand in the deal of the year: the Rs 3,000 crore Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd, which the Darbari Seth-managed company will oversee. For the moment, Seth, and Tata Tea, are on what seems like a never-ending upward swing.

## The defenders

If Uncle Sam doesn't go easy on Super 301, he might discover that the fizz—whatever remains, that is—could go out of US operations in India. Especially for PepsiCo Inc., with its much-touted and much-battered cola, beverage, wafers and



**George Bush: will have to rethink 301 sanctions**

food processing business in India. "We hope," wrote Pepsi president Christopher A. Sinclair to US trade representative Carla Hills last week, "that our government will not have to take any action under the Super 301 process (against India)." Sinclair threw in the bit about the company's plans to invest up to US \$ one billion in India, saying its project would be the biggest Indo-US venture. Pepsi has its reason now that the project is on, after more than five years of sweating around New Delhi ministries and tackling arch-enemies Ramesh Chauhan of Parle Ltd, Charanjit Singh of Pure Drinks and George Fernandes of the big-talk, it can hardly risk losing out with the US government's get-tough attitude. Pepsi is an unlikely ally for India, but when the game is business, it's an open house for friends.





CIVIL AVIATION

# The chaos continues

*The Bangalore A320 crash was just the beginning of Indian Airlines' problems*

**A**fter months of deliberation, the government has finally decided to lease out the remaining 14 Indian Airlines (IA) Airbus A320s it grounded, following the crash at Bangalore on 14 February. The government has also decided to sell off four more A320s awaiting delivery at Airbus Industrie headquarters at Toulouse, France. But the move, instead of resolving a crisis, has merely spawned one.

Preliminary enquiry reports have shown that pilot error, and not aircraft defects, led to the crash which killed 92 people. IA officials accept this truth, so do civil aviation authorities, and reportedly, even Union civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan. But inexplicably, say senior government officials, Prime Minister V P Singh insists on getting the aircraft out of IA's hair.

A final verdict on the crash is expected within six months, when an enquiry conducted by a Karnataka High Court judge completes its investigations. But the fact is that in the meantime, IA—and its passengers—are in big trouble with the A320s out of circulation. The airline has been losing Rs 2.5 crores a week in revenue ever since the planes were grounded (Rs 37.5 crores as of last week). Stalling the planes has also meant that the airline has 30 per cent less seating capacity to offer, taking it back to its 1982-83 level of operations. Now, IA flies 22,000 passengers a day, as against 29,500 before the crash.

And so, IA officials rush about—though reluctantly—doing the government's bidding, looking into the possibility of leasing aircraft to buttress its depleted fleet. At present, IA has 11 Airbus A300s and 24 Boeing 737s. Under normal circumstances, the au-

line had planned to begin phasing out the 737s from June.

"The Boeings are old," says a senior IA official. "We should be replacing them." He says the airline is searching for A300s and 737s as the pilots are already "familiar" with these aircraft. However, IA may find that it is easier to get rid of planes than bring some in, with a very tight international market where the waiting list for new aircraft extends to the end of the decade. And leased ones in good condition are tough to come by—everybody wants them.

IA's woes have probably aided feeder airline Vayudoot Ltd's survival. The country's third-level carrier launched its New Delhi-Bangalore service last fortnight, and more trunk routes are expected to follow. The common industry perception is that Vayudoot would never have been allowed to step into IA's major re-



venue-earning routes if the A320s were still flying. Vayudoot is operating an old, leased Boeing 727 on the sector. Stuck with passenger pressure, the government probably had no other option—at least short-term—but to let Vayudoot in. The recently introduced air taxi services are unlikely to ease the capacity crisis.

**I**n this background, the government's action—or inaction, perhaps—is even more puzzling. At a time when IA needs planes most, it is checking its growth. Moreover, IA still has to take delivery of 12 A320s, an option it firmed up last year, and the government is as silent on that issue as the rest of the A320 imbroglio. Civil aviation authorities say that there is absolutely no way the government can wriggle out of the Rs 2,000 crore-plus deal, as the contract is final.

RAJESH KUMAR



**Civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan**

The deal is all that the government can talk about, really, blaming the past administration for misdeeds to cover its impulsive decision to ground the A320 aircraft. In 1985, the civil aviation ministry suddenly—and inexplicably—withdrawn an order with Boeing Commercial Airplane Co. (IA had even deposited US \$9,00,000 as a refundable advance with Boeing) for its new generation 757 aircraft and instead switched preferences to the A320. This move went against recommendations made by the Dilbagh Singh Committee in 1983, which had suggested the 757 for IA's fleet expansion. The decision to go in for the A320 was strange, as the Boeings were ready for delivery from 1985 but the

A320s only started joining IA last year. The four year delay cost the airline Rs 500 crores for leasing planes to fill the gap.

The Central Bureau of Investigation is investigating the deal. In a first information report (FIR) filed by it, the agency names the then civil aviation secretary S.S. Sidhu, IA managing director Kamini Chadha, deputy managing director B.K. Bhasin, planning chief Raghunandan Prasad (who later became MD, and resigned after the Bangalore crash), along with a host of other government officials. Airbus Industrie and International Aero Engine (the consortium which manufactures the A320s' V2500 series engines) directors have also been named in the FIR. All the accused have been charged with cheating, bribery and "corrupt practices".

But the deal, however murky it may be, did not cause the Bangalore crash

official. "The misinformation (about IA's A320s being unsafe) has caused confusion in the minds of the public. After all, international airlines have been flying the A320 without any noticeable problem." Officials also add that the DGCA has not withdrawn the A320's airworthiness certificate. In fact, the directorate's inspector of accidents, Satyendra Singh, has submitted to the enquiry panel that the crash, "in all probability", was due to pilot error.

But officials hasten to clarify their stand. "Our role is not to go on a fault finding mission," says a DGCA official. "If selection of a particular altitude is the reason for the crash, then that can also be an indication that there is something wrong with the (aircraft's) design. To put it simply, if there is room for human error, then there also must be room for improvement in design."

**The government is blaming the previous regime for misdeeds to cover its impulsive decision to ground the A320 aircraft. This deal is all that the government can talk about, really**



**Prime Minister V.P. Singh**

**I**A's position today could have been entirely avoided, argue aviation experts, placing the blame squarely on the government. Twelve international airlines, including British Airways, West Germany's Lufthansa and US carrier Northwest Airlines fly A320s. Lufthansa has reported "exceptional" reliability with the planes, and so has Northwest, despite a complaint it filed last fortnight with US civil aviation authorities, citing possible "malfunction" in its A320s' flight control systems. But the point is that it has not stopped flying them.

Officials of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) echo this sentiment. "Incidental snags are a part of every plane's life," says a senior

Granted, but the comment seems like a weak retraction of the DGCA's stand. Considering its officials, along with numerous international aviation experts, point out that the A320 is the most sophisticated commercial aircraft in the world. Brushing aside criticism that its fully computerised, "fly-by-wire" technology is not tested enough, they say that the technology is at least 18 years old, long used in fighter aircraft such as US aerospace company General Dynamics' F-16. Adds an Indian Air Force officer: "Military aircraft need more precision, more exactitude and a far greater degree of accuracy than a civilian plane. Fly-by-wire technology is proven, tested and reliable." He should know—in the



event of an Indo-Pak war, he could come face-to-face with a Pakistan Air Force F-16

**G**iving the A320 a clean chit, experts are now questioning the training of IA pilots. *Flight International*, a respected industry magazine, cited Airbus Industrie training reports to make its point. S S Gopujkar, the commander of the doomed IA A320, had a good training report but his instructors also noted that his use of the Electronic Centralised Aircraft Monitor needed to be improved. The report said that "he sometimes forgets check lists." The crashed plane also had a senior check-pilot on board, C A Fernandez. His instructors, in turn, noted in November 1989, that he made "numerous small errors and omissions with the Flight Management and Guidance System" and had mishandled the (engine) thrust levers and the aircraft until the aircraft had stalled. An excerpt of the magazine article reads: "The (Bangalore) accident report suggests the misuse of the flight's auto system and late recognition of the consequences."

While IA officials deny that its pilots were given "incomplete training", DGCA officials say that India is still unfamiliar with the A320's sophisticated technology. Says a senior DGCA official: "Computer technology is only now spreading in the country. While the same six weeks of training (to handle the A320) might be okay for engineers and pilots of more developed countries, it might be insufficient for us. The base on which the training has been imparted is totally insufficient." He adds, "Some 160 pilots were trained. All people are not of equal intelligence. It depends on the individual and his capacity for

absorption."

Pilot error, coupled with the fact that the A320, besides using state-of-the-art technology, is also 40 per cent more fuel efficient than most commercial aircraft flying today, makes the government's attitude regarding these planes even more incomprehensible.



**Today, 12 international airlines including West Germany's Lufthansa and US carrier Northwest Airlines, fly A320s. Lufthansa has reported "exceptional" reliability with the planes**

Detractors of the aircraft have often said that IA purchased the planes when it was more or less on the drawing boards. But that was true of the A300 also, the aircraft that has served the airline so well for more than a decade. Says an IA official: "Five years from now—if the Banga-

alore crash had not occurred—we would have probably been patted on our backs for getting into such a good deal (with the A320s)."

Adds a DGCA official: "We got the planes at a very good price. Now, we are going and selling the planes for which there is such a tremendous demand." Terming the entire A320 episode as "just so much brouhaha", he points out that one charge levelled at the A320 was that its computers could not be maintained in a hot and dusty country like India. "This is nonsense," he says. "Australia is using eight A320s (flying with Ansett Airlines), five are being flown by Northwest in Dallas (Texas). All these places are as hot and dusty as India." He adds that the plane's computers are rated to operate at 55 degrees Celsius, a level that is unlikely to be reached anywhere, certainly not India.

The chaos continues. The government is running out of arguments to defend its grounding of IA's A320 fleet. Actually, it has already run out of them. Perhaps, that is why the Raja and his men are keeping very quiet, and side-stepping—at least officially—every ques-

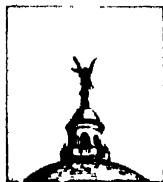
tion about the plane that is thrown at them. But the government has to think about resolving IA's crisis, and soon. There is not much more that the airline's patrons can take—flying IA is back to being a nightmare. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi with Sudeep Chakravarti**



# Communication gap

*Agitating officers paralyse telecom systems in West Bengal*



WEST BENGAL

Sprawled in the corridors of Calcutta's Telephone Bhavan were hundreds of telecom officers on a three-day hunger-strike then slippers littering the floor. Calcutta's telecom services, chance at the best of times, were on the brink of complete breakdown. Over 50,000 telephones were dead, the ticking teletypewriter and telex machines lay silent, computer terminals in airline and railway reservation counters and in newspaper offices, blank. On 24 May, Calcutta's central nervous system had short-circuited. "More telephones will go dead after a few pre monsoon showers," warned Amit Gupta, a junior telecom officer. With Fax machines and STD lines also not working, the state remained cut off from the world.

Like Gupta, over 2,500 members of the Junior Telecom Officers Association (JTOA) and the Telecom Engineering Services Association (TESA) began an "indefinite work-to-rule" (another euphemism for go-slow operations) till their demands were met. When telecom officers first presented their charter of demands in January 1988, senior officials were politely dismissive. "The *burra sahibs* joined in senior positions from the UPSC cadre and quickly skyrocketed to the top, but we stagnate for decades," a telecom employee regretted. Junior telecom officers, assistant and divisional engineers, are promoted after a decade of frustration, he added.

After heated discussions a few months ago, the Telecom Commission finally agreed to create more senior posts, provide special increments for officers with higher qualifications and to quickly promote junior officers. Then, financial problems forced the Telecom Commission to renege on its promises and the officers threatened to launch a protest movement on 8 April. Even last-ditch discussions with Sam Pitroda, chairman, Telecom Commission, failed to avert a showdown. "Pitroda said that he could meet a few demands, but the person-

nel and finance departments were creating trouble," said Gupta.

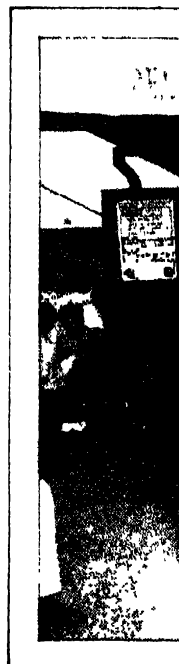
If the stir continues, the city's telephone system, a "national disgrace" according to K P Unnikrishnan who was the union telecommunications minister till recently, will only edge towards paralysis. Over a thousand telephones lapse into silence every day, A K Sanyal, chief general manager of Calcutta Telephones said recently. "With the work-to-rule, there will be delays in repairs," admit the disaffected officers who are normally entrusted with repairing the city's antiquated networks.

Calcutta's telephones, the worst in the country, according to Unnikrishnan, are vulnerable during the monsoons since many cables lack waterproof coverings. Reckless Calcutta Municipal Corporation repairmen who hack at underground cables while digging up road surface and the Metro Railway workers have caused major disruptions. Calcutta's cable thieves are a unique menace. In August-September over one lakh lines including those at the army's Eastern Command headquarters and at major hospitals in south Calcutta went dead when thieves ripped out telephone cables from three underground ducts

in the Maidan. "This doesn't happen in any other part of the country—a total of 12 exchanges were affected for six days," a senior official said. In disgust and desperation a consumer organisation performed *vraddh* ceremonies for a few telephones some time ago in the city streets.

Cable thefts, lament senior telecom officials, are impossible to prevent. "Such underground ducts are located all over the city. It is impossible for us or for the police to patrol these areas or keep a guard posted there," said one official. And, as telecom engineers also have to repair such lines quite frequently, the ducts cannot be permanently sealed.

Metro Railway workers, digging their way through a hodge-podge of water, sewage pipes, telephone cables and other wires, often cause



## Insured spirits

*The CBI exposes a Rs one-crore fraud*

**H**is brashness gave him away. When Krishna Singh filed a complaint with the CBI against an insurance company, he was not expecting to be nabbed by them. But nabbed he was, on grounds of trying to cheat government insurance companies of Rs one crore.

This huge sum involved several cases of insurance fraud—relating to his dead mother-in-law and a non-existent brother. Singh's mother-in-law, Maheswari Devi, had died in February 1985. Quick

to cash in on it, Singh took out three personal accident policies in her name, with three subsidiaries of General Insurance Corporation, between 1 and 6 March 1985. And on 13 March, Maheswari died on paper.

The cause of her death, apparently, was a fall from the roof. A first medical officer of Arwal and a sub-inspector of the Arwal police station, Mahendra Prasad Singh, were bribed into producing fake death certificate.



disruptions. But as Metro work in South Calcutta is largely complete, telephone officials are worried about the fate of the cables in the city's northern parts.

Consumers also allege that the Telephone Bhavan's computers have not

Other telephone users have similar complaints. Most of them are helpless because consumer redressal courts are ineffective. Also, bills, however hefty, have to be settled before any arguments are entertained.

But Calcuttians can now dare to hope. Two public sector organisations—Telecommunication Consultants India Ltd (TCIL) and Hindustan Cables Ltd will provide new equipment while over a lakh new telephone lines will be available in the near future. Meanwhile, a Rs 150-crore joint project by the West Bengal Electronics Industry Development Corporation and the Indian Telephone Industry for manufacturing 50,000 telephones every year at the Salt Lake Industrial complex in Calcutta is on the anvil. But, at the moment, Calcuttians are resigned to years of cross-connections, wrong numbers and astronomical bills even when their telephones are dead. It will be years before telephone services in the city actually improve. Till then, the harassed consumers will have to dial and hope for the best. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**



**Hunger strike by telecom officers: stagnating for decades**

learnt to add or subtract. "My telephone was disconnected because I refused to pay a telephone bill that was clearly exorbitant," says Annada Shankar Ray, the well-known author

and police papers. In fact, Singh's two brothers-in-law, Babhan Prasad Singh, a constable with the CRPF, and Yogendra Prasad Mehta, a government official, were also involved in the fraud. However, when the insurance company grew suspicious, Singh started pressurizing them through MPs and also lodged a complaint with the CBI against the company.

Stirred into action, the CBI unearthed documents proving that Maheswari had died before she was insured, and got confessions from the doctor and the police officer who had produced the fake death papers. A private detective, T.K. Chatterjee, helped in the investigation.

But Chatterjee was not satisfied with this. He suspected more. And mainly due to his efforts, it was discovered that Krishna Singh had also insured an imaginary brother, Anil Singh, for 55 lakhs and had shown fabricated records.

And, as if that was not enough, it was further discovered that this smart Alec had even faked his own papers. No, he wasn't passing himself off as dead, but only as a civil engineer.

The CBI had registered cases (nos. RC 19/5/88 and RC 26/5/89) earlier. They have Singh now. His father-in-law and brother-in-law are also in police custody. The fate of this flamboyant fraud now rests with the court. •

**Jalshanker Gupta/Patna**

## On shaky grounds

*Dissidents might bring down the Congress(I) government of Gegong Apang*



**ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

After Nagaland what? Possibly Arunachal Pradesh. The Congress(I) government of this frontier state, headed by chief minister Gegong Apang, is precariously poised

and could come sliding down any day. At least a dozen Independent MLAs who were supporting Apang's regime in the state Assembly, have severed their link with the ruling party and have formed a new bloc. The situation within the Congress(I) legislature Party is also in no way assuring for Apang. Some senior party leaders have criticised the chief minister's



**Gegong Apang: uncertain future**

"autocratic" style of functioning and could strike at the opportune moment.

Apang is more than aware that he is resting on a loose rock. And, interestingly, he has chosen to approach Prime Minister V.P. Singh to bail him out of trouble instead of his own party president, Rajiv Gandhi. According to Congress(I) sources in the state capital, Itanagar, Apang has been maintaining contacts with V.P. Singh and Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal.



Apang apparently believes that the two Janata Dal leaders will keep him saddled in power if he chooses to switch allegiance

According to some observers, Apang enjoys the support of about 15 to 20 MLAs out of the 36 Congress(I) legislators. The rest are aligned with Apang's opponents such as finance minister R H Khirmey, industries minister K C Rajkumar, state Congress(I) chief Omen Deori and former chief minister P K Thungon. There are 12 Janata Dal members in the House besides 11 Independents, and the Apang regime could be brought down if 12 Congress(I) MLAs were to withdraw their support to the government

Fortunately for Apang, his opponents are yet to form a joint front against him. But disturbing reports reaching the Congress(I) leadership in the north-east suggest that both Apang and Thungon are vying with each other to secure V P Singh's support by throwing party loyalty to the wind

The Janata Dal, for its part, has expressed the hope that it will be able to provide an alternative to the present regime. The party has appealed to all "conscientious" elements within the Congress(I) to follow in the footsteps of their counterparts in Goa, Meghalaya and Nagaland, where dissident Congress(I) leaders were instrumental in bringing down the Congress(I) governments in those states

**What worries the state Congress(I) is the party high command's lack of interest in the affairs of the party's state unit**

Furthermore, what worries the state's Congress(I) rank and file is the party high command's apparent lack of interest in the affairs of the party's state unit. They feel that the only way to prevent the fall of the Congress(I) government in the state is by ensuring close cooperation between the senior leaders of the party in the state. But that possibility seems to be receding every day and the Apang regime's future is becoming increasingly uncertain. •

**Rabjit Chowdhury/Itanagar**



**Jeeshu being operated on: a major feat**

## Born again

*Doctors at the AIIMS repair multiple defects in a newborn baby's heart*



**DELHI**

It was a unique event that did India proud. A team of surgeons at the cardio-thoracic and vascular surgery (CTVS) department of New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) took seven hours to plug two holes and switch blood vessels in the heart of a weak, 55-day old baby weighing 2.4 kg who wouldn't have lived very long.

Jeeshu was born to Kamlesh and Kishan Kumar Arora, farmers in Hissar, Haryana, at their home on 21 March. When he was brought to the hospital's emergency ward on 25 April, his lips, nails and tongue were blue. His parents knew he was in trouble, but they didn't know why. All they could tell the doctors, between sobs, was that Jeeshu had difficulty in breathing ever since he was born.

The baby's struggle for life had begun. Doctors diagnosed his complaint as the "blue baby syndrome" and admitted him into the paediatric ward of the hospital. Further investigations revealed that he was suffering from two congenital heart defects called ventricular septal defect (VSD) and transposition of great arteries (TGA). The VSD indicated that there were two holes in the wall

separating the ventricles, and the TGA meant that the pulmonary artery, which carries deoxygenated (impure) blood, was leading out of the right ventricle (instead of the left ventricle) and the aorta, which carries oxygenated (pure) blood, was coming out of the left ventricle (instead of the right). The baby's pure and impure blood were mixing up as a result. This accounted for the "bluish" effect.

Once the doctors had decided to operate on the baby on 15 May—a rare decision in view of the enormous cost to the institute—they prepared for the marathon heart surgery. The operation took seven gruelling hours and was a nerve-racking process. A team of 15 doctors, surgeons, assistants, nurses and helpers, headed by Dr I M Rao, Dr K S Aiyer and the anaesthetist, Dr Praveen Kalia, got to work on the baby in the morning. Jeeshu was cleaned up and given anaesthesia at 9 am. The actual operation started an hour later. The baby's rib cage was cut with an electronic cutting machine, and then the layer of muscle. The heart was exposed. As soon as the incision machine touched the heart, the artificial heart-lung machine which had been connected to the baby, was activated.

"Normally," says an AIIMS spokesman, "the work on the heart takes an hour or so, but in this case it took four



hours." Considering that Jeeshu was a weak baby, weighing only 2.4 kg on his 55th day, the operation was doubly difficult. It was done in two stages. First, the holes in the wall separating the ventricles were closed with tissue from another part of the body. Second, the pulmonary artery and the aorta were severed at their junctions with the heart and transposed. By the time the operation was over, it was 5.15 p.m.

"He's doing fine now," Dr Ayer said about his unusual patient 45 hours after the operation was over. The baby was under an artificial respirator in the intensive care unit (ICU) at the time of writing. Jeeshu's breathing seemed to have improved, and the doctors hoped to move him out of the ICU soon. The doctors believe he will be fit enough to be discharged within 20 days.

According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, out of every 4,000 live births, one such case is reported. And the chances of such a baby surviving without special care and special surgery are very poor. The journal says that 55 per cent of such babies would die within one month and 95 per cent within one year. "Operations on such babies are done abroad on a regular basis, but never has one been done in India," says the AIIMS spokesman.

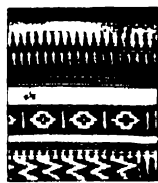
The operation is obviously expensive. Says the spokesman: "The drugs and other items that we have to purchase from the market cost about Rs 15,000, which we usually recover from the patient. But we don't charge him for anything else because we are a government establishment." The major cost has to be borne by the government. Only one other hospital in the country—the Madras Mission Hospital—has the equipment to perform similar surgery. "But there it would be ten times more expensive," says the AIIMS spokesman. The hospital now plans to develop its paediatric cardio-thoracic and vascular surgery facility "to help the poor" because of the large number of cases it is receiving of children born with heart conditions.

Jeeshu is the first beneficiary of the scheme. When he grows up to understand medicine and heart surgery, he will probably realise that he was not born in Hissar, but under strobelights in an AIIMS operation theatre, at the hands of some of the country's best doctors.

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**

## Far to go

### *Chakma refugees decide to return only after the CHT is demilitarised*



TRIPURA

The problem of the refugees from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), who have taken shelter in India, is proving to be more intractable than the government of Bangladesh had expected it to be. Last month, a Bangladeshi delegation came to Tripura to hold talks with Indian officials and leaders of the refugees to woo the Chakmas back to Bangladesh. But the attempt proved futile.

The Chakmas fled the CHT after Dhaka began settling Muslims in the area and the Shanti Bahini, a guerrilla outfit of the Chakmas, opposed the move fiercely. By the end of 1987, over 65,000 tribesmen fled the battle-scarred mountains and entered India.

To arrive at a solution, the government of Bangladesh began a dialogue

with the Bahini in July 1987, but President H M Ershad called off the negotiations after 14 months of fruitless talks. Ershad later brought three Bills in the national Parliament, granting a measure of autonomy to three CHT districts and announced polls to the district councils.

The polls, held last June, were marred by widespread violence resorted to by the Shanti Bahini, which opposed the government's move. In the aftermath of the elections, the district councils failed to function and remained hamstrung without the ability to run its writ in the troubled hills. So, before long, Dhaka realised that there could be no peace in the CHT unless the government arrived at an understanding with the Shanti Bahini.

On 10 May, a delegation of Bangladeshi officials, led by Muheed Chowdhury, held meetings with Indian officials and leaders of the Chakma

refugees at Jatanbari, in Tripura, in their effort to woo the tribesmen back to Bangladesh. But the talks failed, as the Chakma leaders made it clear that they were not willing to go back unless the Bangladesh government arrived at a durable settlement with the Shanti Bahini and the CHT was demilitarised.

Muheed Choudhury described the attitude of the refugees as "adamant",



**Chakma refugees in Tripura: a floating population**

but told newsmen that his government was prepared to explore all ways of solving the problem to the extent of resuming the dialogue with the Shanti Bahini.

The Bahini, however, is not enthusiastic about Dhaka's latest overtures. "They just want the refugees to return so that Bangladesh is spared the adverse publicity that affects its foreign ties with nations that insist on linking aid with human rights records."

The Bahini guerrillas have been striking hard whenever they get the opportunity and over 30 people have been killed in the CHT in the past two months. But if Dhaka succeeds in convincing the Bahini that, this time, it means business and is prepared to give and take, there will be reason to believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

**Subir Bhowmick/Agartala**



# Sudden death

*Peace moves are jeopardised as a PLA moderate is gunned down by the extremists*



MANIPUR

Rajee Mangang the young commander-in-chief of the powerful insurgent group, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), did not know that death was near. On the morning of 11 May, he was out taking a leisurely ride on his bicycle, when he was killed by his own compatriots in an Imphal suburb. Rajee carried a reward of Rs 50,000 on his head, but he was never in the hit-list of the security forces. For, Rajee was a moderate, who wished to wrap up the decades-old insurgency in Manipur by holding talks with the government. In fact, Rajee had returned to Imphal after chief minister (CM) R K Ranbir Singh declared his readiness to hold talks and announced amnesty.

But Rajee's luck had run out. The hardliners within the PLA did not take kindly to Rajee's hobnobbing with the CM's envoys. On 11 May, Rajee was gunned down in Singjamer at 11 am, when the locality was humming with activity. The assailants, who came in a two-wheeler, accosted the 30-year-old commander and fired five rounds at him. Rajee died on the spot.

Rajee's killing marked yet another gory chapter in the periodic feuds in the seemingly monolithic command structure of the 14-year old PLA. It was in Singjamer that guerrillas loyal to Bishwar Singh, a fabled PLA leader, shot dead Sudhir Kumar, who pioneered militant secessionism in the Imphal valley. In another incident, Bedamoni, an IIT (Industrial Training Institute) dropout, was gunned down at Unipok in downtown Imphal, when a battle for succession to the PLA chief's post erupted after Bishwar Singh was arrested by the army in July 1981.

Rajee's death has come as a setback to Ranbir Singh's efforts to begin talks with the insurgents. The six-party United Front (UF) had promised to bring peace in Manipur in its election manifesto. Ranbir Singh sent feelers to the insurgent leaders through his chosen intermediaries soon after he assumed office.

At first, Rajee was not keen on holding talks, as the arrest of his mentor, Khaidem Manikanta, rankled the PLA leaders. Manikanta, the fourth



Rajee's body surrounded by his relatives: tragic times

Ojha (leader) of the PLA, had swallowed the bait of the peace talks and came overground in early 1989 from his hideout in West Burma to negotiate with the former Congress(I) CM Joychandra Singh. But Tompok Singh, Joychandra's *bete noire*, who doggedly opposed the peace initiative, threw a spanner in the works by getting Manikanta arrested by the Assam Rifles (over which the Manipur government does not have control) in March 1989.

Rajee, a college dropout, however, chose to respond to the present CM's overtures. Though Ranbir Singh refused to divulge the progress of the peace negotiations, SUNDAY learned that Rajee and Manikanta (now lodged in an Imphal jail) insisted on a few preconditions. First, they insisted that the main negotiations be held with the Centre and wanted the Man-

ipur government to play a mediatory role only. Secondly, they ruled out the possibility of the PLA surrendering arms till the parleys bore fruit. Thirdly, they wanted the other insurgent groups to be invited to the talks at the penultimate stage.

The assassination of Rajee is obviously meant to convey to Ranbir Singh that the hardcore elements among the 150-strong PLA are now calling the shots, and they are determined to keep the embers of insurgency burning. One such element told SUNDAY at a hideout at Thongzu near Singjamer: "New Delhi wants to keep the Meiteis (the dominant community in the state) under its thumb."

The intelligence agencies suspect that the killing of Rajee was masterminded by Bhorot Singh, who is emerging as the spokesman of the more militant sections within the PLA. He has about 80 armed followers scattered in the valley. The expatriate groups of the PLA—one led by M. Praveen Sharma alias Kala and the other by Nganthoi Singh and S. Phalguni—have reportedly thrown their lot with the anti-Rajee hawks. Praveen Sharma has opened a joint command with the Naga guerrillas, led by Muivah, at Pangmi area, in the Kachin territory of Burma. He has 40 armed insurgents with him. Another 60-

member PLA group, now in five training camps in Sylhet district, in Bangladesh, is also likely to infiltrate into the state.

The authorities are also worried by the groundswell of popular sympathy for the PLA. In mid-April, the PLA built a memorial for their dead colleagues at Cheiraoching near Imphal, and hundreds of people, mostly women and children in their traditional mourning dress, took part in a silent procession. A step-up in the insurgency is the last thing that Ranbir Singh would like to see happen under his rule, as any knee-jerk reprisal against the PLA is bound to erode his government's popularity.

Said a senior police officer grimly: "The countdown to the troubled times seems to have begun, and Manipur may not be the same again." ●

**Santanu Ghosh/Imphal**



# Down with defections

*The Congress(I) takes its rebel MLAs to court for joining the PDF*



GOA

Recent events in Goa have raised a constitutional question which is a superior body when it comes to deciding matters pertaining to the affairs of the Assembly--the state legislature or the Supreme Court? And the future of the newly-formed Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) government, headed by Dr Luis Proto Barbosa, depends largely on the outcome of this debate.

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court, seeking the disqualification of seven rebel Congress(I) MLAs, who broke away from the party and teamed up with the Opposition to bring down the Congress(I) regime of Pratap Singh Rane and helped form a new government headed by Barbosa. And if the Supreme Court verdict goes against the rebels, the chances are that the new government in Goa will also collapse.

The petition filed in the Supreme Court by the Congress(I) leader, Dr Wilfred D'Souza, seeks the disqualification of the seven rebel Congress(I) MLAs under the Anti-Defection Act. On 24 March, when the then Congress(I) chief minister Pratap Singh Rane was on a visit to Kolhapur, the former Speaker, Dr Barbosa, along with six other rebel Congress(I) MLAs, resigned from the primary membership of the party and formed the new Goan People's Party (GPP). That reduced the Rane ministry to a minority. Two days after the resignations, the GPP joined hands with the then Opposition Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) and formed the PDF government.

But even before the Supreme Court petition was admitted on 17 April, two other petitions were filed by Congressmen in the House, hardly a week after the PDF was sworn in, seeking the disqualification of the seven rebels. One of the petitions, filed by Luizinho Faleiro, a former minister in the Rane Cabinet, sought the disqualification of the former Speaker, Dr L P Barbosa, on the grounds that the law permits

the Speaker to voluntarily resign from the membership of the party to which he belongs on the condition that he does not join any other party while holding the post of Speaker. "Barbosa should be disqualified since he joined the GPP while he was still the Speaker," says Luizinho.

Another petitioner, Dominic Fernandes of the Congress(I), sought the disqualification of the other six rebels. In his plea, Fernandes said: "Since in their resignation letters they did not

House will be kept in abeyance until the Constitution bench disposed of the petition.

Jhalmi, of course, did not like the idea one bit. "Nobody can tell me or the Speaker to keep the petitions pending. The House is supreme," he ranted. "Para 7 of the 10th Schedule debars the court in such matters," he added. Dr D'Souza, however, argues that the clause has already been struck down by the Punjab and Haryana High Courts.

At the next hearing on 2 May, a joint statement was filed by the counsel for Jhalmi and Speaker Surendra Sirsat, assuring the court that they would not adjudicate until it disposed Dr D'Souza's petition. However, both Jhalmi and Sirsat later denied having given any such under-



Barbosa: not very secure



Jhalmi: on a collision course

claim any split in the Congress(I), nor has any faction arisen out of the 'split', they should be disqualified."

The Supreme Court proceedings are also interestingly poised. During one of the hearings, the counsel for the rebels, Ram Jethmalani, argued that the court did not have the right to decide on Dr D'Souza's petition. The five-judge Constitution bench, headed by Chief Justice Sabyasachi Mukharji, nonetheless was on the point of restraining Jhalmi and the Speaker, Surendra Sirsat, from proceeding with the enquiry into the two petitions pending in the House. It felt that the seven rebels should not have taken any part in choosing Jhalmi for conducting the enquiry. However, Jethmalani assured the court that the defendants would give an undertaking to the effect that the probe in the

taking, and the controversy began all over again. This time it was between Jhalmi and the advocate general (AG). Jhalmi said that he was impersonated in the Supreme Court, while the AG maintained that he had filed the statement in consultation with Jhalmi.

The conflict between the AG and Jhalmi seemed to have died out. But a few days later, when the issue seemed to have been settled, Jhalmi was back in the news, when he once again denied giving an undertaking to the court and declared that he would go ahead with the probe in the House.

As a result, much interest has been generated all around. On 24 July, the Supreme Court will hear D'Souza's case for the final round and its verdict could well turn out to be historic. •

**Besco De Sousa Eremita/Panaji**



# The Tau stoops to conquer

*And the fun is just beginning*



(Vacillating Prevaricating) Singh is gone. V.P. (Value-based Politician) Singh has come.

So, what else is new? In Haryana, the same team that got mayhem spelt Meham is exactly where it was. In Chautala's endearing phrase, "*Mukhya mantri koi bhi ho, raj to hamara chalega*". In English translation, that means even if the referee has ordered the centre-forward off the field, the rest of the players are the same. The goal is the same. The coach is the same. The new captain is not of his progeny. But certainly of the same breed. And the coach's instructions to the captain are clear: forget about the other side, concentrate on nobbling the referee! Nothing of substance has changed. Natha Singh—Prem Singh.

One and the same thing.

The man whose name is synonymous with immorality in politics remains our deputy prime minister. The man whose name is synonymous with morality in politics made him his deputy—and keeps him his deputy. In fact,

Shri Morality-in-Politics became PM only because Shri Immorality-in-Politics taught him a trick or two. So, which is the more accurate? That V.P. Singh became Prime Minister because he represents a new breed of morality in politics? Or that V.P. Singh became Prime Minister because he cajoled the Tau into telling a black lie to cheat the Young Turk-turned Old Arab of his democratic, inner-party right to say "no" to V.P. Singh? *Ashwathama athaha kunjara, Mr Prime Minister? Kaun Ali Baba? Aur kaun chalis chor?*

What we have seen in the last few days is not a morality play but a vicious power game. The National Front is now the National Akhara. And *kushti* being a quin-

tesentially Haryanavi sport, the Tau is now circling his opponent. No holds barred. First round to V.P. Singh. Second round—time!

It all seems so familiar. Morarji Desai won all his initial skirmishes against Chaudhary Charan Singh. But the last skirmish was won by the Chaudhary. In history, it is the last skirmish that counts. Try as he might, Morarji could not—and eventually dared not—rid himself of the Chaudhary. It was the Chaudhary who rid himself, his party, and the country, of Morarji. Farcically (or is it tragically? Ask Marx, ask Jyoti Basu) history is repeating itself. It is precisely what made Morarji and Charan Singh the Odd Couple of the Seventies that makes V.P. Singh and Devi Lal the Odd Couple of the Nineties. However much they dislike each other, they can either survive together or perish together. This, in the Goenka Gurumurthy vocabulary, is called "value-based politics".

Morarji left the Congress thinking he would take the Congress with him. The Congress remained where it was. It was Morarji who found himself in the wilderness. In *banwas*, he met the very *rakshasas* he had fought all his life. The *rakshasas*, knowing that without a Congressman they could never find their way out of the woods, made Morarji their leader—and even, for a moment, moved into Ayodhya. But, once there, they all became their natural selves. The *jhaghdas* started.

Till 13 July, 1979, Morarji won every bout with his "followers". Suddenly, without warning, the *rakshasas* turned the tables on Rama. Within 24 hours of the commencement of the



**V.P. Singh:** Our moral Prime Minister now has to make up his mind. If he wants the Janata Dal to remain together, he has to accept the Tau and his shenanigans. And, if he does, he stands compromised. If he doesn't, he goes exorcised.







NITIN HA

In short, the Tau was the Mamashree and V P Singh no more than Duryodhana VP, it is true, brought in a few weighty generals, such as that paragon of value-based politics, Arun Nehru (and, let us in fairness add, a merry band of minority communalists, led by the Shahi Imam and Maulana Obaidullah Khan Azmi—whose inflammatory speeches on cassette sell in Pakistan like dates in Ramzan but are barred for their flavour in India!) But the muscle and the moneybags, the brigades and the booth-capturers, the calculated compromises and strategic simulations were all the Tau's contribution to the National Front

**Devi Lal:** A man who has fought and clawed his way through the jungle of Haryanavi politics, and is not going to meekly accept the drubbing he has just received

As the Tau saw it, the Raja was meant only to reign in his Raj. The

last crisis, Morarji was out. The final blow was struck by George Fernandes—yes, yes, the same Georgie Porgie—who loyally defended Morarji in the Lok Sabha in the morning and brutally punched him one under the belt the same evening.

The two major lessons of 1977-79 are there to be learnt. The first is if Rama leads a *vanar sena*, he may face many initial setbacks but, in the end, victory will be his. If, on the other hand, he leads a *rakshasa sena*, he may win many battles initially, but, in the end, his own *rakshasas* will eat him up.

The second lesson is, you can build a house of virtue only with the bricks of morality, but if the mason you choose is a Chaudhary Charan Singh or a Chaudhary Devi Lal, the cement is bound to be adulterated. And the *manzil* will come crashing down just as the *mehfil* is settling itself in for the evening!

**T**he *Indian Express* stumbled accidentally on this truth even as it was exulting over the taming of the Tau. For, in the very editorial in which it abused Devi Lal for having fathered Chautala (and congratulated Dr V P

Singh on a successful abortion) it also praised the Tau for his "sterling contribution" to the formation of the National Front.

And sterling it was, indeed. For while V.P. Singh provided the Field Marshal's baton, it was the Tau who provided the army. It was the Tau who forged an understanding between the trans-Jamuna Jats of Haryana and the cis-Jamuna Jats of western UP, thus bringing under one roof, as it were, the house of Charan Singh and the house of Devi Lal. It was the Tau who put together a coalition of backwards right across the Gangetic basin (both Mulayam Singh and Laloo Prasad Yadav are the Tau's men) which provided the roughage for the Janata *khichri*. It was the Tau's tentacles which reached out to casteists and chauvinists everywhere bringing into the Janata Dal fold every sectarian grouping from the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) to the Telugu Desam to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). And it was the Tau who set the example in electoral adjustments with majority communalism by giving the BJP a place of honour in his fiefdom.

Tau was going to do the ruling. Devi Lal is now discovering that he is being done down. A man who has fought and clawed his way through the jungle of Haryana politics is not a man who is going to meekly accept, or graciously acquiesce in, the drubbing he has just received. He will now use the office of deputy prime minister, as every one of his predecessors has done, to pull the rug from under the Prime Minister's feet.

The fact is that, very wisely, the founding fathers of our Constitution did *not* provide for the office of deputy prime minister because that is the seat where the snake sits. Indiraji tried to pacify Morarji with the post. He bit the hand that fed him. Morarji, in turn, tried to buy off Charan Singh with the post. The Chaudhary Saheb finished Morarji. The Chaudhary then made Y B Chavan his *upa-pradhan mantri*. Chavan left the Chaudhary to moulder—and went back to his previous patron. The Tau is now in Willingdon Crescent, and will not be sated till he secures squatting rights in Race Course Road.

Our moral Prime Minister now has to make up his mind—or someone else



is going to make it up for him. If he wants the Janata Dal to remain together, he has to accept the Tau and his shenanigans. If he does, he stands compromised. If he doesn't, he goes exorcised. Meham was not an aberration. It was the inevitable outcome of the kind of politics that the Tau and his *venanis* embody. It is on this brand of politics that V P Singh has built his prime ministership. In short, if he rids himself of those who brought him to power, he can make no claim to a new politics of morality. And if he does stake any such claim, the Tau's battalions will desert him. Then V P Singh like Morarji—will fade into obscurity, a historical curiosity, a virus in the computer of history.

**T**his is the real significance of V P Singh's brand of value-based hypocrisy. Whatever the Santosh Bharatiyas, the Vinod Mehtas and other drum majorettes of V P Singh may say, the people of India did not vote V P Singh in as Prime Minister because they saw in him a reincarnation of the Mahatma. (In fact, they did not vote him in as Prime Minister at all but gave him a mere 20 per cent of the vote—but that is another story. Let us get back to morality and the Mahatma.) For one thing, Gandhi was not a coward. He did not run from every crisis as V P Singh has done throughout his life (remember him ratting from Lucknow without even a by your leave—when the going in UP got really rough as all his many mistakes recoiled on him?).

Second, when the Mahatma left the Congress, the Congress went with him. When V P Singh went, the Congress remained with Rajiv Gandhi. Weepy carried only a bunch of disruptive (Arif), discredited (Mufti), disreputable (Arun Nehru) defectors. Third, and most important—in the wilderness, Mahatma Gandhi compromised with no one. V P Singh, on the other hand, has shared his political

bed with anyone ready to make it. Beginning with the Tau. For it is the Tau and none other who has been VP's friend, philosopher and guide in leading him through the labyrinthine Kurni-Koeri-God-knows-what maze of caste, creed and convenience.

Then came V P Singh's flirtation with regionalism. As a member of Indiraji's Cabinet, and then as virtual number two in Rajiv's, V P Singh was very much part of the team that fought the vicious ethnic exclusivisms of the AGP that have now brought Assam to this murderous pass. Nothing fazed,

ity *Express*. Then Hyderabad. On comes NTR, saffron robes and all—a revivalist Tantrik film star, the very embodiment of everything reactionary that V P Singh had hitherto fought against. Never you mind: one more berth is filled in the *Morality Express*. On to Madras, there to embrace Karunanidhi (yes, he of the dark glasses and the much darker past) and his son, Tamil Nadu's Chautala, M K Stalin (whose myriad depredations make the other Stalin sound like a children's fairy tale left behind by the Soviet Festival in India). On

they come too. A brief stop at Bangalore to pick up Hegde (so beloved of *Morality Master* L C Jain "Now I resign now I don't") whose arrack-bottling, land stings and telephone-tapping make him the ideal companion for poker games on long train journeys. And so the *Morality Express* winds its way to Delhi.

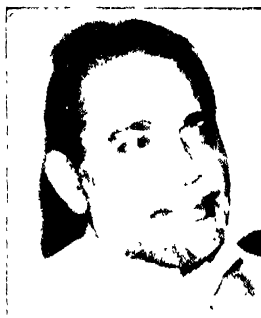
For the life of me I cannot understand what makes anyone equate morality with such a bunch of time-servers, opportunists and utterly dishonourable men (and women, now that Chandrika Kenia has discovered a secular stronghold in the Shiv Sena). The Tau—or someone of his ilk—is the natural leader of such a den. V P Singh is there merely for decoration. He thinks he is the *shikari*. But he really is only the *bakra*. As he bleats on about morality, the drumbeaters are bringing the tiger to the kill. V P Singh will soon have served his purpose. The Tau will then not need to dis-

guise himself as Bommai.

For the truth is that we don't have a *Pradhan Mantri* and an *upa-pradhan mantri*. We have a *nakli* and an *asli*. The *nakli* thinks he is the *asli*. And the *asli* is getting ready to show him who is who. So, watch this space. Dara Singh vs King Kong: the fun is just beginning. ●

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.

## ON BOARD THE MORALITY EXPRESS



**Ramakrishna Hegde:**  
*An ideal companion for poker games on long train journeys*



**Biju Patnaik:**  
*A byword for corruption, chicanery and devious dealings*



**N.T. Rama Rao:**  
*A revivalist Tantrik filmstar, the very embodiment of everything reactionary*



**Karunanidhi:**  
*The man with the dark glasses and a much darker past*

V P Singh has no moral compunction in taking the AGP on board his *Morality Express*. Engine-driver Shourie blew the whistle. Next stop: Bhubaneswar. And who do we have here? None other than one-time daredevil pilot and patriot (his immense riches notwithstanding) Biju Patnaik. Subsequently, of course, a byword for corruption, chicanery and devious dealing. No matter, one more ticketless traveller jumps aboard the Moral-



# The healing touch

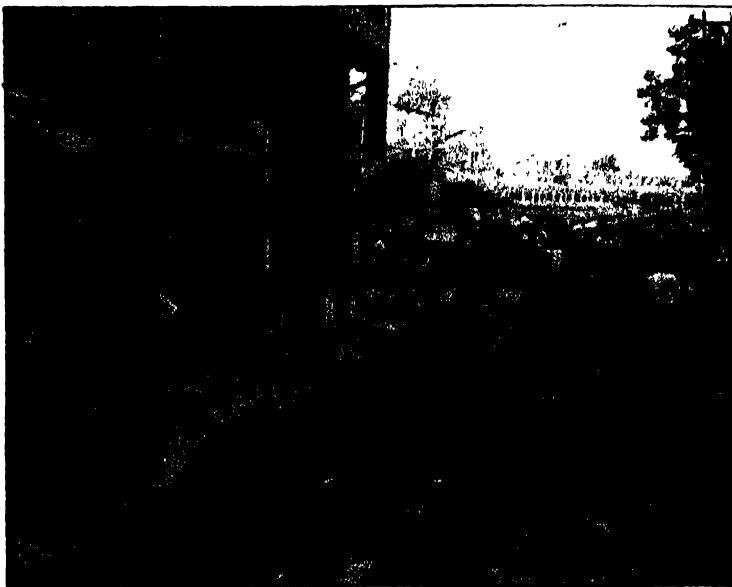
*But plans of beautifying the Golden Temple remain incomplete*

**T**he striking contrast is likely to attract the attention of all visitors to the Golden Temple. The road circling the well-maintained shrine has been dug up and the neat row of shops outside the temple premises are now a heap of rubble. Immediately after Operation Black Thunder in 1988, the Centre had announced an ambitious multi-crore plan to beautify the surroundings of the Golden Temple and build a security corridor around the shrine. Landscape artists from all over the country were consulted and there was even talk of architects being despatched to Mecca and the Vatican for training.

Two years have since elapsed but the project is yet to take off, let alone take shape. And instead of the promised gardens and fountains, visitors have to make do with dug-up roads, slush and mangled structures. Said Manjit Singh Calcutta, secretary of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC): "I fail to understand why there is so much delay. This is surely not a serious issue like the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab or the river water dispute."

An agitated Calcutta recently wrote to Prime Minister V.P. Singh about the matter. He explained that while the SGPC has nearly completed repair of the damaged portions of the holy shrine, plans for beautification as well as construction of the security corridor have come to a standstill since the announcement of the elections last year. Warned Calcutta: "The Sikhs are seething with anger. In the name of development, the government has caused havoc in the area."

And the community has reason to feel agitated. First, the government was in a tearing hurry to demolish the shops and houses around the temple without even making alternative



**A dug-up road near the Golden Temple: messy affair**

NITIN RAI

arrangements for those displaced. According to J.S. Puri, commissioner of Amritsar's municipal corporation, as many as 471 structures in the vicinity of the Golden Temple have been brought down, displacing 1,224 people. Of course, liberal compensation had been paid to those ousted from

## Manjit Singh Calcutta: resentful



NITIN RAI

the area: of the total outlay of Rs 69 crores for the project, a sum of Rs 30 crores was spent on doling out compensations.

Puri, who is overseeing the construction of the security corridor, said: "There is no real problem that we are facing except that too many agencies are involved in the project. But I am confident that the corridor will be complete by the end of 1990."

According to him, a masterplan prepared by the Indian National Trust for Art and Heritage (INTACH) has been sent to Chandigarh

for approval. The project has been somewhat delayed because the state administration, apparently, wanted major modifications to be incorporated in the INTACH plan.

Whatever be the reason, the inordinate delay has led to a lot of resentment among the locals and the SGPC members. Manjit Singh Calcutta charged that engineers working on the project have not turned up since December last. Moreover, unauthorised structures have come up in the area cleared by the authorities. And most of the shopkeepers who were uprooted are living an uncertain life because nothing concrete has been done to rehabilitate them.

Madanbir Singh, who runs a cloth shop close to the Golden Temple, feels that large-scale corruption is holding up renovation plans. "Half the money released by the government has been polished off by the contractors," he said. The authorities, of course, vehemently deny this. They point out that a large sum has been spent acquiring rare plants and shrubs that will transform the Golden Temple surroundings into an exquisite garden. Surely, this is a distant dream at the moment. •

*Ritu Sarin/Amritsar*



# Keeping the dream alive

*Lured by celluloid fantasies to Bombay, the fringe people continue to wait for the Big Break*



GAUTAMI PATOLE



MALVINDER MANGAT

"Everybody wants to sleep with you, from the producers, the directors to the secretaries. I wish I had the guts to tell them, 'Look I have come for work and not to spread my legs'."

**B**right lights, big city and broken dreams. That's Bombay for many a star aspirant. They arrive in the film city, more often than not from some back of beyond town, looking for that break which will catapult them into the big league overnight. Only, the success stories of such stars as Dev Anand, Dharmendra, Amitabh Bachchan and Sridevi notwithstanding, it's not quite so simple after all. The wait can extend to several years, with only the odd bit role providing occasional relief.

But the celluloid fantasy refuses to let go of these fringe-people. And they hang around in Bombay, living in dingy paying-guest accommodation, spending all their time chasing often illusory contacts, and doing the obligatory rounds of producers' and directors' offices. Money is hard to come by, though film rags insist that the women earn it on their backs. Not all these stories are true, but much of the muck sticks. So do the would-be stars, evincing a touching faith in their ability to break the hoodoo.

Dolly Jena, for instance, has been around for 13 years. Born in Orissa, she arrived in Bombay soon after she finished her schooling to try and make it. She is still trying. And as she goes through the tortuous process of visiting producers and directors in the hope of landing a role, she can't miss





**DEV ANAND**

**Every aspiring actress lands at his doorstep. He sees them all, though for most of them he has a standard line, "Don't call me, I'll call you"**

GAUTAM PATOLE

while some say "come tomorrow". It is an exit line which could well be sculpted on her tombstone

**D**olly Jena is, at least, an outsider. But the industry doesn't treat its own any better. Ramesh Imam, trying to make it big for the past five years, belongs to a *film* family. Immensely large villain Anjad Khan is his brother-in-law and his father Akhtar-Ul-Imam was a successful scriptwriter who wrote for such filmmakers as B.R. Chopra. Not surprisingly then, the younger Imam had silver-screen ambitions.

After a short money-making stint in Dubai, Ramesh returned to Bombay to storm the industry. He was in for a

rude shock. His father, who had given up scriptwriting for poetry, had been long-forgotten, and nobody believed that the son had any talent worth speaking of. B.R. Chopra remembered him as a child artiste in one of his productions, but as far as an "adult role" went, it was strictly no-go.

When in despair, fall back on a crash course in acting. That's exactly what Ramesh Imam did, only to get back on the *film* merry-go-round. The ride doesn't seem to lead anywhere, but the actor remains hopeful. "I have grown up in the lap of the film industry," he says. "That is one of the main reasons why I keep hanging around. The industry is in my blood. I am a good actor and I am sure if given a chance, I can do what Salman Khan has done. All I need is one break, one hit."

Things aren't entirely hopeless, as yet. Imam has just finished shooting for a television serial, Kundan Shah's *Circus*, and is suitably thrilled about his little role. If he gets noticed in this, it could mean that the big time was just around the corner.

the smirks that are flashed in her wake. But Jena carries on gamely, convinced that her talent will see her through.

Jena's career would, perhaps, have taken off if she had been noticed in the cameo she performed in Kamaal Amrohi's *Razia Sultan*. But the film bombed at the box-office and Jena was back where she'd started—Orissa.

Back home, she had some success, landing a major role in *Jaga Bahu*, a remake of *Sholay*. Jena claims that she was honoured as the best actress of the year by the Orissa government. The Hindi film industry remained unimpressed, however, giving her the cold shoulder while treating her as a hot property off the studio premises. All Bombay had to offer Jena was cold inhospitality. But Dolly insists that she will stay on: "I know I have been around for quite some time. But I know that one day I will make it. It took even a great actress like Meryl Streep ten years to break into Hollywood. I am willing to wait." Dolly claims that she's okay for money: her parents back home in Orissa help out, and she does manage to sign the occasional television serial. About allegations about her "life on the side" she says disgustedly: "I do not wish to discuss sick minds." Nor does she wish to discuss the number of times she has been humiliated. Some snigger openly, others are downright rude.



**RAMESH IMAM**

**"The industry is in my blood. I am a good actor, and I am sure, given a chance, I can do what Salman Khan has done. All I need is one break, one hit"**



But, if *Circus* turns out to be another non-starter, Ramesh intends packing his bags and leaving for Dubai. "Five years is a long, long time," he observes. "I know what it means. The sheer frustration of waking up every day, hoping and waiting for that break, that one call which will transform your life, and then seeing the chance shatter before your eyes, destroys you completely." But until end-1990, Imam will be lurking around somewhere in the film city, waiting to be discovered.

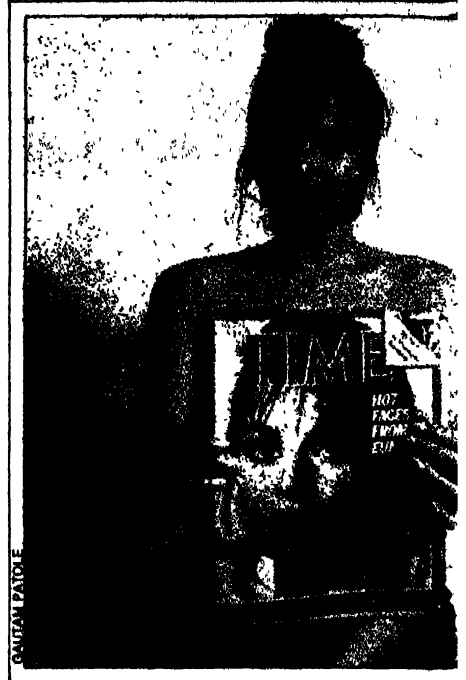
The plethora of Ramesh Imam-types in the city ensures the popularity of such star-makers as B.R. Chopra. "Yes, they all come to me," admits Chopra. "You will be surprised at the trash I have to deal with sometimes. They all swear they have great talent but all of them are useless. They hang around at my office, on the sets, at parties, waiting to be noticed. But it is not for me to tell them to get back to the towns and villages from where they came." If Chopra does spot someone interesting or with some potential, he suggests an interview, or even, a screen test. But not many of the youngsters so honoured ever come up to scratch. Says Chopra: "I don't blame them for hanging on. Not when a story like that of Salma Agha's is possible. She just walked into my

office and I knew I had found my leading lady. If it could happen to Salma, it could happen to anyone."

**M**angal Dhillon, for one, is certain that it will happen to him. Born in Punjab village, Wandertane, to a small-time farmer, Mangal heard of the magic city of Bombay while yet a boy. His success in a couple of school productions seemed to indicate that he had a bright future in the field of histrionics, and Dhillon took the first opportunity to move to Delhi. Here, he pursued theatre full-time, and fashioned a reputation of sorts on the capital's theatre circuit.

But the lure of Bombay proved irresistible and Dhillon sacrificed his incipient stage career to move to the home of the Hindi film industry. The city had him totally flummoxed. "This is a city of madness," he says. "When I first came here three years ago, the huge crowds always on the move zapped me. Nobody had the time for me and I became lonely and frustrated. I began talking to myself for hours. I was going insane."

Three years later, however, Mangal appears to have learnt how to cope. "I have stopped talking to myself," he confides. "Now I feel that I need these mad people around me, or I will die. This is one big insane asylum and I am



happy to be one of the inmates."

**S**ome of the inmates come from as faraway as Sacramento, California. The name is Malvinder Mangat, the looks are darkly sexy and the ambition is, yes, to do a *Sridevi* (or even a *Kimi Katkar*, at a crunch). Mangat, having worked in West German theatre for a while, thought that Bombay would be the proverbial cakewalk. Two years, and no films later, she is considerably wiser, and clued in on every trick the filmwallahs are liable to pull.

When she first landed in Bombay, however, she was shocked at the sexual basis all business dealings appeared to have. That, at least, hasn't changed. "Everybody wants to sleep with you," she exclaims, "from the producers, the directors to the secretaries. I wish I had the guts to tell them, 'Look I have come for work and not to spread my legs.'"

Instead, Malvinder participates in polite conversation heavily laden with sexual innuendoes, overlooking the overly disgusting in the hope of landing a role. She has been advised that she should be "nice" to people, and in the Bombay film world that could mean anything from straight to group sex: it all depends on the individual director/producer/hero (and if you're really out of it, a small-time secretary). Even after the required dose of "niceness", however, there is no guarantee that a worthwhile role will be forthcoming. Instead, the all-too-



**AMITA NANGIA**

"People are so indifferent. I nearly had a nervous breakdown...I have not got what I've been looking for. But I have talent and my work is good"



## DOLLY JENA

"I know I have been around for quite some time. But I know that one day I will make it. I am willing to wait"

familiar line of "come tomorrow, I will see" is brought into play

Mangat goes through all this with only one hope that she will get her own back when her day dawns "To fetch a price in the industry, you have to first sell yourself," she admits self-deprecatingly "It's a hard game"

While her parents back home in the States send her "survival money", hoping, no doubt, that she is not another victim of the casting-couch syndrome, Mangat gives herself another year in the celluloid city. After that, she insists, she will go back to America and, perhaps, take to a career in flying (she holds a private pilot's licence). She had managed to land a bit role in Shyam Benegal's *Discovery Of India* and other lesser-known television serials, but her performances have largely gone unnoticed. But Mangat continues to dream of the day when the producer of her dreams will drive up in his Mercedes Benz and say: "Come along kid, I'm going to make you a star"

**W**hat girls like Malvinder are looking for is a Dev Anand prototype, having been fed on the media legend that the evergreen star launches a new face every six months. All of which makes life for Anand very difficult, with every aspiring actress landing at his doorstep. Anand insists he sees them all, though for most of them he has a standard line, "Don't call me, I'll call you." "I obviously cannot take on every girl who comes

to me, I am not so young anymore," he jokes. "But, you can never tell. From a thousand faces there will be one that will be a big hit. The ones who do not make it go back to wherever they came from, or they destroy themselves. I came to Bombay with nothing but a dream to make it, and I did. The struggle is part of the scenario that makes up the film industry. Fighting to get there has a charm of its own."

The charm has certainly got New Delhi-based former model Amita Nangia hooked, though she did spend her initial days in the film city crying her eyes out. "People were so indifferent," she reminisces. "I nearly had a nervous breakdown. But my mother was around and I pulled through. It is still difficult and sometimes even my God doesn't listen to me when I cry."

The overworked lachrymose glands notwithstanding, Nangia has had it easier than most. A mere three years after she began "struggling" she has signed a major role. She plays a college girl who gets raped on the college premises. The film is not a big banner one, but Amita hopes it will get her noticed in the quarters that matter. The break may not be a big one, but, Nangia knows, thousands of others would give their right eye for it.

"True, I have not got what I have

been looking for," admits Amita. "But I have talent and my work is good. Maybe, if I had a godfather in the industry it would help...still I am certain I will make it to the top."

To ensure that this dream comes true, Nangia has signed up with the Roshan Taneja acting school, which has trained such stalwarts as Anil Kapoor, Jaya Bhaduri and Mithun Chakraborty. Taneja's school is by far the best-known among the acting schools that mushroom in the city and the fees of Rs 10,000 are said to be worth the dividends that follow. Taneja, apparently, has the happy facility of making the rise to the top that much more easy.

Taneja, however, is the first to discount this myth. "I get thousands of applications from all over India, and even from abroad. The ones I select do have talent, but here in Bombay—as elsewhere in the world—that is no guarantee. Let's be frank. There are thousands of my students who have gone back to wherever they came from, broken and disillusioned."

But celluloid fantasies survive all such horror stories. And the often fatal—attractiveness lures more and more hopefuls to the bright lights of the dream city.

Godfrey Pereira/Bombay

## MANGAL DHILLON



"This is a city of madness. When I first came here, nobody had time for me...I became lonely and frustrated. Now, I feel that I need these mad people around me"



# Getting better

Business Plus sweeps past Newstrack

**T**here's nothing a critic loves more than to see his suggestions accepted. But equally, there's nothing more galling than when his criticisms are anticipated and the product improves even before he's had a chance to sound off. So it has been with this critic and *Business Plus*.

Two issues ago, *Business Plus*, the video business monthly devised and directed by Amit Khanna, came in for some stick from SUNDAY. Despite the middling quality of the first cassette however, we were sanguine about the magazine's prospects if only it were to follow our suggestions.

As it happened, both SUNDAY and the second issue of *Business Plus* hit the stands at roughly the same time. And, lo and behold! The suggestions had *already* been implemented and the video magazine transformed beyond recognition.

As things stand today, *Business Plus* is the best video newsmagazine on the market. It is even better than Living Media India's *Newstrack*, which, unfortunately, has hit a bit of a dull patch recently.

The second issue leads with a punchy report (by Siddharth Bhatia) on the Larsen & Toubro imbroglio. Though the Ambanis refused to cooperate, the segment is fair and balanced. S. Gurumurthy, who takes the government's side, is powerfully telegenic and Rafique Dosani, who acts as an impartial commentator, has a wonderful screen presence.

Almost as good is Tavleen Singh's report from Kathmandu on the pro-democracy demand with the urbane Pashupati Rana stealing the show. Tavleen is even better when she handles the Pitroda versus Unnikrishnan battle. And though the cabinet secretary refused to let Pitroda appear on camera, he still wins this round of their battle, largely because Unni sweats profusely into the lens and delivers his side of the story through a

nudge-nudge-wink-wink series of innuendoes.

The real test of a magazine though, is its ability to make complex issues seem accessible. *Business Plus* manages all right with its report on the trade deficit, largely because of the high calibre of three of its interviewees. Isher Judge, who is sensible and restrained; Deepak Nayyar, who could well be Pashupati Rana's first cousin, and the urbane Shankar Acharya, whose smooth, assured performance suggests that anybody who wants to be economic adviser to the finance ministry must display the same TV skill as Prannoy Roy.

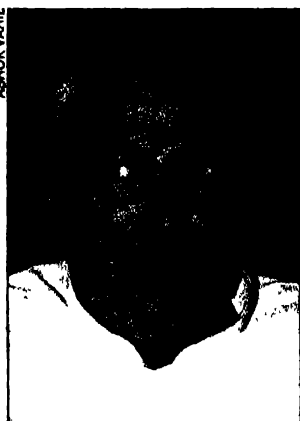
Other segments also work well. C.Y. Gopinath is a TV natural and makes the marketing section come alive; the ebullience of Viren Shah's personality is guaranteed to make anything featuring him seem enjoyable; and Amrita Shah's Telco report is interesting even if it suffers from not having anybody from the management giving his side of the story.

Some of *Business Plus* still doesn't work. Gita Piramal's interview with the tiresome K.K. Modi (called "Mr Modi" throughout) is even worse than her tedious Rahul Bajaj interview in the first cassette. The stock market report is neither enlightening nor well-presented. And Meenakshi Behara needs to learn how to sit on camera if she is to lecture the audience.

But the dramatic improvement in quality makes one wonder ab-



(Above) K.P. Unnikrishnan: Pitroda won the round by proxy



Om Prakash Chautala: *Newstrack's* current obsession

out *Newstrack*, which—these days—is more fun to read about than to watch. The April/May combined issue continues the obsession with Devi Lal, Om Prakash Chautala and Meham. It confirms what everybody already knew, that Lal is a boor and Chautala a ruthless crook.

The segment on prostitutes' children—which delayed the release of the cassette for a month—is something of a let-down after all the sound and fury it generated. The facts appear to be as follows: the Delhi police decided that as prostitutes had no right to bring up their children, they would confiscate them. *Newstrack* was invited to film the raid. However, the cops acted with needless violence and so, asked *Newstrack* not to release

the footage. Moreover, it was also felt that it was a violation of the privacy of the kids. *Newstrack* went to court and won the right to release the footage and said it would conceal the children's faces.

This is interesting to read about but on the tape itself, is jumbled and distracting. Nobody is quite sure what *Newstrack* is objecting to: the violence, the fact that the cops treated the kids badly or that the police presumed to confiscate the children in the first place.

Nevertheless, there are compensations. Dev Anand is almost too good to be true and Madhu Trehan has finally matured into an authoritative and relaxed anchor-person. And perhaps next month will mark a return to form. •

**Vijay Sahni**

*Business Plus*, Devised and directed by Amit Khanna  
*Newstrack*, Produced by Living Media India Ltd  
Executive producer Madhu Trehan



# "Pervert? Who, me?"

*Rajesh Khanna, Rekha, Bina Ramani and more on Starbuzz*

**Z**eenat Aman tells the story of her first day in the film industry. She arrived at a dirty, dusty studio on the outskirts of Bombay and spent the whole day being shoved around by sweaty unit hands, who shouted and gesticulated at each other. Finally, she was led to a tacky make-up room, had layers of goo pasted on her face and was then thrust in front of bright lights and told to look sexy.

"My God," she said, "where's the glamour?"

"You are baby," they told her, "you are."

That, unfortunately, is the great secret of the Bombay film industry. The glitter and the gloss are strictly for show. Up close, the movie business is not very different from a poorly organised cottage industry, except perhaps that it contains a preponderance of paunchy men in open-necked shirts who drink too much bootlegged scotch and call each other "ji".

The film magazines get away without revealing this side of the business because the editors know that what the fans want are bedroom romps and tales of fear and loathing on location. Tell them the truth—the business is dominated by 25 rather tedious individuals who lead maddeningly mundane lives—and there goes the circulation.

A video magazine, however, doesn't have it so easy. Take the case of *Lehren*, the oldest cassette magazine in the business. When it is not concentrating on Chunkey Pandey or Shatrughan Sinha, the magazine sends camera crews to cover *muhurats* and jubilee functions. Sadly, all follow the same pattern. Large persons in shiny clothes with obviously dyed hair hug each other, and present seemingly identical bouquets to the guest of honour. As the magazine's budget does not extend to a sound crew, we never find out what they are saying to

each other (though it appears to be things like: "Papaji, picture *theek chali na?*") and have to be content with a voice-over telling us how incredibly glamorous all these people are.

The great thing about *Starbuzz*, the video magazine edited by Prochi Badshah, a former editor of *Stardust*, is that it gives us the film industry, warts and all, and still manages to seem interesting.

The current issue has as its star, Rajesh Khanna, the crinkly-eyed, puffy-cheeked actor who was a rage in the late sixties. As anybody who reads

obligingly revealed by a lengthy ad for a video featuring his older songs, later in the same cassette. Just as the silicon-topped 'new' Mumtaz looks nothing like the snub-nosed pixie who captivated a nation, so today's Khanna bears virtually no resemblance to the man who was once a phenomenon. No wonder he's finished.

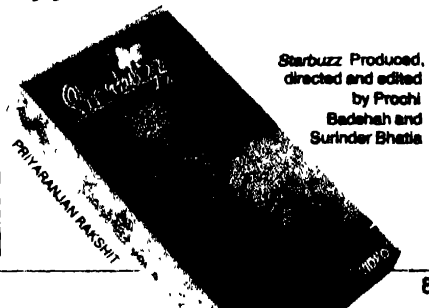
Also on the cassette is a segment of Rekha's 'secret *shaadi*'. (Some secret. She seems to have spent her entire wedding night phoning friends, publicists and the press to tell them about it.) Considering the readiness of some

stars to tell all for the camera, it has always been a mystery how actors feel when the details of their personal lives are revealed to thousands of strangers. Here, it is not even the principals who spill the beans but the irrepressible Bina Ramani, who decides to explain how Mukesh Aggrawal's ex-girlfriend, Akash Bajaj, fits in. Then, she goes on to outline Amitabh Bachchan's view, before concluding smugly that Akash and Amitabh are alike.

There's more in *Starbuzz*. the anti-drug show, Poonam Dhillon's quiz, Amrita Singh looking like Naseeruddin Shah in drag and a touching segment on Smita Patil's son in which, it seems, everyone has resolved Not To Mention Raj At All.

It's a little long-winded at times but great fun nevertheless. Now, if only *Starbuzz*'s distribution was as good as its content! •

**Vijay Sahn**



**Rajesh Khanna; the phenomenon that was that was**

GAUTAM PATOLE

*Stardust* regularly will know, on most occasions, Khanna is a tiresome pedant, given to such grandiose statements as "I have no camp, only refugees have camps" or even "I am not indisciplined; the only reason I report late is because I have piles and take long in the bathroom."

Fortunately, *Starbuzz* takes the bull by the horns and asks him, point-blank, if he is indeed a wife-beater, sadist and pervert. "That's a very nasty question," says Khanna nastily and proceeds to explain why nobody—apart from him—knows the answer. Why did Tina leave him, then? "Because I'm an actor." Pause. "I'm not an industrialist." Sneeer.

And so on. The most interesting thing about the segment, however, is how Khanna's current appearance contrasts with his style in his heyday—



**S**ridevi is livid with Mithun. She believes he has betrayed her trust by telling *Stardust* about their secret marriage. And Mithun maintains the conversation with *Stardust* was strictly off-the-record. Sridevi does not believe him and sadly, neither does his current wife Yogita.

**I**s Rekha really pregnant? According to the *film* grapevine, she is. Though this seems highly unlikely, and the lady is not confirming anything. Not that her silence has stopped cynics from speculating that a tall dark baby with a bass voice is on its way.

**W**hen will Ramesh Sippy marry Kiran Juneja? The way the marriage keeps getting put off, it appears as if he never will. Recently, he had jaundice, pneumonia and a breakdown of sorts in quick succession. In the process, *Akela*, his multi-character, emotionally complex (read tedious) Amitabh Bachchan starrer has also been delayed. And now, he must decide what comes first: Marriage or *Akela*'s release? Given his record, guess what Sippy will put off yet again.

**K**imi Katkar is still trying to live down the embarrassment she went through last month at the shooting of *Khoon Ka Karz*. After a particularly trying day of emoting and exposing (more of the exposing and less of the emoting naturally), Ms Katkar was getting ready to pack her bags and leave. Things didn't turn out quite that way though—she walked right into three of her ex-boyfriends, Sunjay Dutt, Vinod Khanna and Mohnish Behl.



**Sridevi: disbelieving**

After awkwardly smiling and mumbling something about how busy she was, she did manage to get away. But the future Mrs Sheorey sure knows who and what to avoid now.

**T**ina Munim's affair with a prosperous middle-aged Gujarati continues. While her family is not too tolerant about her latest involvement, concerned friends have been able to

discern a definite pattern in Tina's affairs. Every time she is involved with a younger man, sooner or later, she turns to an older man. A delinquent and highly-strung Sunjay Dutt sent her to an older and wiser Rajesh Khanna. And it has happened again this time. After she broke up with Anil Ambani she managed to find herself an older Gujarati type.

**Kimi Katkar: an awkward moment**



KALYAN CHAKRAVORTY

**I**n the past Sanjana Kapoor had demonstrated how faithfully she had inherited the famous Kapoor sense of excess from her father, Shashi Kapoor. Witness the manner in which she ran away from home to live with an unemployed, immature Aditya Bhattacharya.

Now at last she has shown that she has inherited something from her mother too. Her one-woman-show in Bombay is drawing full houses and rave reviews.

**S**hatrugan Sinha's popularity with the new government has certainly enhanced his position in the film industry. Predictably, he is basking in the attention *film* people are showering on him.

Recently, he amicably settled some massive FERA problem which Gul-



GAUTAM PATOLE

**Shatrughan Sinha: free services**

shan Rai had been agonising over for quite some time now. And unlike the other fading star who supports the Janata Dal, he expects no money for services rendered.

**T**he latest joke doing the rounds in Bombay's film world is that Amitabh Bachchan is talking about V. P. Singh the same way as Parveen Babi used to talk about the ex-superstar. Fair enough, says a rival star. Isn't V.P. Singh screwing Amitabh Bachchan? •



# Anybody for English?

*Never mind Mulayam Singh Yadav: the language does have its uses*

**T**he Mulayam Singh Yadavs of the world notwithstanding, about 340 million people across the world speak English. Most of them live in the USA and UK, but the number of people in India who can converse in English (estimated at about 20 million, a mere 2.5 per cent of our population) actually outstrips the number of English-speakers in either Canada (16 million) or Australia (15 million). There are over 4,000 Indian periodicals in English, second only to the total in Hindi (6,800).

These statistics place English-speaking Indian in an advantageous position internationally because (now that English has become the *de facto* lingua franca of science and technology, academic conferences and scholarly journals, even politics and pop music) they have a fortuitous head start in the rapidly-diminishing global arena of communications. In American universities, for instance, where hundreds of Indian postgraduates flock every year for higher studies, their greater English skills give them preference for teaching assistantships over the less fortunate, but equally talented, Chinese, Japanese or Koreans. Such advantages should never be neutralised.

Our knowledge of English can, in fact, be put to good use. We could, for example, project our own culture and learning to foreigners through English translation. From another perspective, of the 26 languages with over 30 million speakers each, as many as 10 are Indian.

Ours is the single largest country with such a multitude of major languages. In such a situation, it seems the duty of bilingual literary specialists in India to make our rich vernacular literatures available to the English-speaking world at large. Even more importantly, in the context of our recent history of regional parochialism and communal conflict, it becomes imperative to have good translations of the best literary works from every Indian language, for these foster the ideals of national commonality as opposed to the prevalent communalism. To a reader, translated literature invariably generates understanding of

that culture, whether it is international or internal. The English subtitling of foreign feature films on Doordarshan is a case in point. But we lack these windows into our sister states—how many of us know about their award-winning poets or fictionists? What have we done to circulate these works to readers outside our country? Very few and very little are the respective answers.

In contrast, an Englishman knows far more about European literature because of the competent translations available. But the Indian government's literary wing, the Sahitya



**Mulayam Singh Yadav: barking up the wrong tree**

Akademi, has done very little in the area of English translation. It established a prize for excellent translators (as recently as in 1989), and initiated an ambitious long-term project titled *Modern Indian Literature* comprising a definitive selection of the most outstanding literary works written in all the Indian languages between 1800 and 1975 in their English renditions. But it would, perhaps, make better sense to also translate major Indian classics (ancient and modern) in an authoritative English-language series.

Indian universities must also rid their English departments of the tendency to slavishly teach Arnold and *Beowulf*, Congreve and Dickens. The more enlightened among them,

particularly in south India, have already introduced large chunks of Indian writing in English and English translations of Indian texts in their syllabi. If students in a literature department can read Greek tragedies in English versions, there's no reason why they cannot study Kalidasa in English too.

Several universities have approached the University Grants Commission (UGC) with proposals to open translation cells so that more authentic work in this area can begin. One-year diplomas in translation exist in such varieties as Agri, Karnatak (Dharwad) or Guru Nanak Dev (Amritsar), while Tamil University (Thanjavur) has probably the only fully-fledged department of translation studies. Recently, two universities in Calcutta hosted national seminars on translation within months of each other reflecting the new awareness of the value of translation in a multilingual nation like ours.

A major share of the responsibility for promoting translations devolves on publishing houses. However, major publishers of English literature, such as Oxford University Press, have not fulfilled their obligations in this department. Their sporadic publications of English translations of Indian literature do not suggest any methodical approach. After commencing amid a lot of fanfare and high hopes, Penguin India has disappointed by mainly issuing reprints of earlier books and original writing in English (of not very high standards either), although its British parent offers such definitive translated sets as the *Modern European Poets* or *Penguin Classics*.

Problems do confront the highly significant activity of translation in India, but they are not unassailable. While Mulayam Singh Yadav and others may continue to believe in the Italian epigram *traduttore traditore* ("The translator is a traitor"), at least as far as the English language is concerned, with some luck the translator into English of Indian literature may do more for the cause of national integration than many of our politicians. •

**Ananda Lal**





# From the mouths of poets

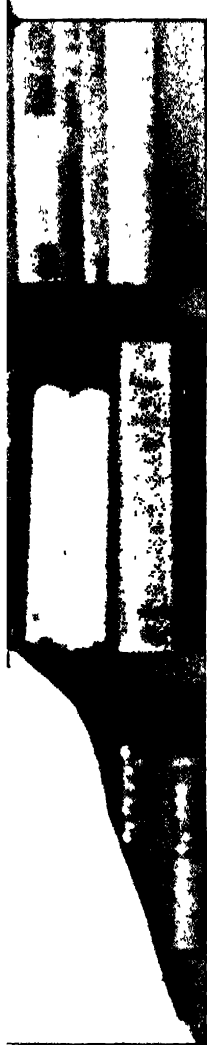


*Dom Moraes on his  
adolescent years, and the  
distinctive experiences  
which shaped his genius*

*When My Son's Father was first published (in 1968) Dom Moraes was criticised by the London press for his presumption in writing an autobiography when he was only 30. But for the young poet, who had had a traumatic childhood and adolescence, writing the book served as a catharsis of sorts. Penguin India has now reissued what Moraes considers his best prose work. This extract describes Moraes' first visit to England, his admission into Oxford and the times he spent with such literary figures as Sir Stephen Spender.*

**O**nce more I was on a ship. It was a sister of the one that had sailed us to Australia, but this time it was going the other way, my journey was irrevocable, and I was alone. In the blue and lazy dooryard of the sea, during the first days out, I brooded over books. They were designed to inform me about England. They were books of pastoral verse, by Clare, Blunden, Andrew Young. I read about badgers, flowers and village life with pleasure, but eyeing the English people around me, also with disbelief. This was





perhaps fortunate. It's silly to have too many illusions.

The days before my departure had been full of visitors, who were full of advice. A solicitous old man told me how to befriend my future landlady. I must invite her, he said, to the pictures once a week, and after the pictures buy her quantities of fish and chips. "It is the common habit," he informed me "In this way all English landladies expect to be treated." But I didn't intend to spend my time with landladies. I intended to be with poets, and, if lucky, with a beautiful woman or three. Yet in a sense I was grateful to the stream of visitors, each one postponed for a little my realisation of imminent departure.

On the day, therefore, I was unprepared. At breakfast it occurred to me that I would not again sit at table with my father for some considerable while to come. It did not affect me at once because I could not realise it to be true. After breakfast, saying goodbye to the servants, it affected me rather more. By the time we drove to the docks, however, the familiar

spectacle of Kutthalingam's plump uniformed shoulders and bald head in front had become painful to look at. While my father talked nervously, I maintained a tremulous silence.

It was only broken at the end. My father saw me to the cabin and tipped the steward. Then he conducted me to the restaurant, and tipped the headwaiter. "Find my son a good table, will you?" he said, and the headwaiter said effusively, "Don't you worry, sir, I will." Then the last bells went, and we emerged on deck. There Kutthalingam stood, weeping, and put his arms round me. "My young master," he wept, "my young master. You coming back quickly. I waiting for you." Then he disappeared, and in a blur I saw friends' faces, and shook hands mechanically with several people. Out of the blur my father's face came suddenly clear. He put an awkward hand up and cuffed my ear lightly. "Goodbye, son," he said very abruptly. "Be a good boy." I broke my silence. "Don't go," I said, but he had gone.

Amongst the other passengers who strolled past my solitary deckchair were an English

mother and daughter whom my eye picked out frequently and sadly. They were blonde and beautiful, the mother a svelte woman in her late thirties, the cornsilk daughter about fifteen. The daughter fell madly in love with me in my fantasies, but in actuality she never spoke to me, nor could I ever really hope that she would. One afternoon, however, there was a knock on my cabin door. I opened it to find the blonde mother outside.

"Oh," she said, "the boy with the book. I've noticed you on deck. If you're who I think you are, I knew your parents years back, in Bombay."

I stammered for a while, but she cut me short and said, "Do have a drink with us tonight. I'm with my daughter, and she's about your age." So, unbelieving, I said I would. That night, in the bar, I met the daughter for the first time. Seen close to, she was even more beautiful than I had imagined. She was also even more unattainable than I had imagined for though I yearned at her sadly, she ignored me from the start.

She continued to ignore me. The ship was full of boisterous young people who swam, played deck tennis, and organised fancy dress parties. It was, in fact, an idyllic place for Celia: she was always bounding off to some new entertainment, and the only times she ever seemed bored were when she was with her mother and me. Then, like a small cat, she would curl in a chair, her pink mouth widening in the most unostentatious of yawns. I suffered.

Alice said, "It takes a long while to get to know my daughter." I didn't believe her. It seemed to take the lively young men on the sports deck a very short while to get to know Celia. "It's only me," I said dispiritedly. "I'm hopeless when I meet people." Alice's blue eyes dwelt on me a moment, amused yet sympathetic, then she began to talk about literature.

This, indeed, was a constant topic with her. She had vague literary ambitions, and had been writing a novel, apparently, for several years. She knew a number of writers, of whom she spoke with an unaffectedness that delighted me. Her marriage had not been a success: she was on her way home to divorce her husband. When she spoke, in a rather wistful way, about her hopes for Celia, I experienced a flutter of tenderness and excitement, partly because she was talking about Celia, partly because in her I saw a normal motherhood in operation, which was new to me. Rubbing salt into my wound, I talked to her often of Celia. We passed a lot of the day together, for to my surprise she seemed to find me likeable. I showed her my poems, which she duly admired, and told her about my hopes, which she duly encouraged. After dinner, feeling very masculine, I led her to the bar for a drink to wind up the day.

One morning Milton, making my bed,



**E.M. Forster's gentleness, which was extreme, calmed me, and I failed to feel, as usual, my lack of conversation**



remarked, "Still waters run deep. Coo-er, you quiet ones are the worst. I hear you've picked up the best bird aboard, and her only twice your age. Bloody marvellous."

He startled me. When I thought about it, I realised he had told me a fact I had not really known. I was not in love with Celia at all, I was in love with Alice.

**T**he ship nosed further north. It moved now on a dull sea, under a dreary sky. After Marseilles, when I set foot in Europe for the first time and failed to find it extraordinary, pullovers appeared, and shortly after that every one assumed coats like identities. Alice and I paced the deck and talked about England. She obviously looked forward to it eagerly, to her friends and the places she had not been to for a long while: as the ship leant into the Channel her nostrils flickered like those of some intelligent dog, scenting home. Though to her I was a shipboard acquaintance, the young son of friends, to me she had become much more. I felt that I was being abandoned, especially since she was going up to Scotland at once, but then in a subconscious way I supposed I wanted to be abandoned. In a poem written during this time there is a line, "I am in love and long to be unhappy." It expressed my feelings perfectly, at seventeen.

However, she was staying in London overnight, so I arranged to meet her for dinner. She gave me a telephone number, and then disappeared from my life for the last day of the voyage. She was packing. I tipped Milton, and he packed for me. I had not, at this time, ever packed a suitcase for myself.

The night before we docked, I lay awake, looking up through the porthole at the cold foreign stars. I was full of apprehension and of love. With half my mind I thought of Alice, the other half filled slowly with fear of the unknown. It disappeared when the next day was flooded with sunshine, through which over a shrunken sea, the scrubby flat coast of Essex came into view, and slowly, groaning and hooting, while the decks filled with excited people, the ship pushed into Tilbury docks. We had arrived.

I was met by Mulgaokar, the London correspondent of the *Times of India*. He was an amiable, languid man, a friend of my father's. We sat together in a train that roared through vista upon vista of ugly prefabricated houses, laundry flapping sadly in the backyards.

"I've found you some digs," he said. "At least my secretary found them. We'd better go and look at them first."

I nodded, a little frightened at the prospect of digs. The train snorted its way into St Pancras, shuddered fastidiously and stopped. We took a taxi to Earl's Court, where a sleazy landlady showed us to a barren cubicle on the top floor. "It's nice and clean," she said, "and

only three pounds a week." Net curtains fluttered drearily in the windows. Mulgaokar fixed an appalled eye on them. "No, no, no, no," he said, "this won't do. You'd better come and stay with me till we find you somewhere."

So I walked to Piccadilly Circus, where I had my first meal in London, at a Chinese restaurant. Then I wandered about till I came to the Odeon at Marble Arch. There I watched a film about Ulysses. Afterwards, not being quite sure where Mulgaokar lived, I took a taxi back. I was very pleased I remember, when the driver called me Sir. This was the first of a sequence of taxis since travel on a bus or tube involved so many inquiries, I preferred to travel everywhere by taxi. The habit, formed then, still persists.

Back at Mulgaokar's, I found he had finished work. He yawned, which he often did, in order to belie the acute efficient mind behind his mask, and said, "I'll buy you dinner. What sort of food do you like?" "Thanks awfully," I said, "but I'm supposed to take someone out to dinner myself."

"Oh," said Mulgaokar, with quizzical brows. "Oh, really?"

I inquired if there was a good restaurant in the vicinity. "The Ritz," he yawned amusedly, "is just round the corner." I had heard of the

**Said Stephen Spender to Moraes, "Don't worry. You're very young still. You have to find your way. You ought to be at Oxford, with people of your age"**





Ritz. I telephoned Alice and asked her to meet me there. There was a rather puzzled pause, then she asked if I were serious. "Of course," I said, indignant.

We met at the Ritz, and had an excellent, if expensive dinner. I was tremendously happy, and talked well, and felt I was a Londoner already. Afterwards I took her back in a taxi to the house where she was staying. I had drunk a lot of wine at dinner, and as we passed St George's Hospital I muttered, "I love you." The lights of the hospital illumined her pale shocked face as she turned it to me. "What did you say?" Tentatively, I repeated it. As we jolted on, the lights of the hospital fell alternately on her face and mine, so that I had the sensation of being in the middle of a slowed film. "No, no," she said. "It's absurd." The lights fell on my face. She looked at me, then said very gently, "It's not absurd, of course not. I'm very flattered. But, you know, I'm in love with someone already."

"Oh, Alice," I heard my own horrified voice saying, and I fell forward, pushing my face into her cloudy, scented hair, and, my mouth full of it, muttering rather inarticulately, "Alice, Alice, Alice."

"Dear boy," she said a little absently, and stroked my hair. I went on muttering, "Alice, Alice, Alice," but somehow the hand on my hair was very soothing, and it was as though the name Alice was somehow my mother's name.

I returned home shattered, yet elated to know that I was capable of such unhappiness. Mulgaokar, when he saw me, grinned, and said dryly, "You have lipstick on your collar." "I know," I said, proud, remote, melancholy, and then I went to bed.

That was my first day in London.

It was autumn, the gutters and parks of the city were populated with dead leaves. A shrunken sun occasionally squinted out of a cloudy sky. I had nowhere to go, and nobody to go with. I had never learned to cook, so when I awoke I would go to a place in Sloane Street, breakfast there, and read the papers. Then I walked to the park, and squelched my way to the Serpentine. There I stared at the willows that wept by the water for a long time. Afterwards I went to a coffee bar, till the pubs opened. I had a local, in which I sat apart, reading, drinking, and sometimes lunching, from opening time till closing time. I think it was at this period that I developed a habit of heavy alcoholic consumption which I have never quite lost. There was nothing else to do, besides, it cheered me up, and made me more confident. After lunch I usually went to the British Museum. Wandering round, amongst other silent people, looking at things, soothed me: also, the first time I went there, I stood and stared at one of the large pharaonic heads in the Egyptian room, and presently saw, rising from a crouching position of scrutiny on the floor beside it, an intent man whom I

**Wandering around the British Museum, I saw an intent man—Henry Moore. It confirmed a fact I had started to doubt: artists did inhabit London**

recognised as Henry Moore. It confirmed a fact I had started to doubt: artists did inhabit London.

The *Encounter* office was much smaller than I expected. It was tucked into a little street off the Haymarket, and ascending in the lift I felt a tremor of nerves, wondering which contributor might not be there: Edwin Muir perhaps or Koestler? Or perhaps (with another tremor) even Auden?

There was nobody there, except a nice secretary. "Oh, is Stephen expecting you?" she asked. "Just go through there, his office is on the left." I crept down a short passage, and found Spender in a room full of books and paintings. He loomed up from a chair to shake my hand, and inquired how I found London. "Everybody seems to be in an awful hurry," I said. He laughed, and made me less nervous. I showed him some poems, and was delighted



beyond measure when he said, "We must publish some of them. A page of them, perhaps." Then he said, "Who would you like to meet?" There were so many people I wanted to meet I couldn't decide, but he solved my problem by saying, "You ought to meet Morgan Forster." He wrote out a letter of introduction, and handed it to me. I looked at it with awe, a passport to a country beyond the crammer's.

I despatched Spender's letter to Cambridge, and a few days later received a note from Forster asking me to tea at the Reform Club.

He was a small, comfortably plump man, with a grey moustache in a face which, like that of some intelligent hare, was both inquisitive and withdrawn. His gentleness, which was





extreme, calmed me, and I failed to feel, as usual, my lack of conversation for he had evidently noticed this lack, and at first he talked and I listened. He talked about India, then about Cambridge: then I felt confident enough to speak myself.

He saw me off, helping me courteously into my overcoat in the hallway. When my coat was on, I asked awkwardly if he would like to read my poems. He withdrew once more. "I don't," he said evasively, "know much about poetry. I couldn't write anything about them." I felt that he misunderstood me. "I don't want you to write about them, sir," I said, "I only want you to read them."

The day after I met Forster I wrote to my father to ask whether I could travel in Europe before I went up to Oxford. He replied to say that I could, provided my admittance into Jesus was definite for October 1956. My aims had now come clear: savagely I worked at my Latin. The examination day approached, and on the day before it I was to sit for my entrance examination at Jesus. One dingy day of frost and mist, I left London on the Oxford train.

When I reached Jesus, I still had a few minutes before my interview. I wandered through the College, its green quadrangles, its weathered yellow walls, and beyond them a hideous new wing swaddled in scaffolding. I hoped I wouldn't have to live in it. Still, the whole atmosphere elated me.

Eventually I found myself in the Principal's study, facing a line of dons. In the centre the Principal, Mr Christie, sat, silver-haired and friendly. He asked me various questions,

**Said Raymond Chandler:  
"Nehru's a fool. He's selling out to the communists everywhere"**

*My Son's Father* an autobiography by Dom Moraes  
Published by Penguin Books  
Price Rs 60

which I answered, then the other dons took over. One of them asked me in what area, if I lived in Elizabethan London, I would expect to find Sir John Falstaff drinking. It seemed to me an irrelevant query, but I hazarded Cheapside. "No," said my questioner, but Mr Christie smiled benevolently. "He knows it, obviously," he said. "He means Eastcheap."

I still had to wait for the results of my college entrance and my Latin Responses. But the time now was not as tedious as it had been. On most Sundays I lunched with the Spenders at their house in St John's Wood. Here I first met Spender's wife, the pianist Natasha Litvin, a tall, beautiful woman whose vigorous brisk manner concealed great sweetness of nature, and their children, Matthew and Lizzie. Inarticulate though I still was, I found myself able to speak to the Spenders, but with other guests I tended to relapse into a beaten silence.

One of these guests was Cyril Connolly. I was so overawed when Natasha told me on the phone, the day before, that he would be at lunch, that I rushed to Simpson's of Piccadilly and bought a new suit. In it, I arrived in St John's Wood in a state of pride and terror. Connolly was already there, with his wife, the writer Barbara Skelton. She lay, languidly beautiful, on the sofa, moving a hand like a lily over the west of the carpet. He sat in an armchair, under a vivid Ghika. He had an attractive batrachian expression, and a surprisingly soft voice, in which he asked me, "Where did you buy that suit?"

Very self-conscious, I said, "At Simpson's."

"Hm," said Connolly. "It doesn't fit you."

At a later time, I met Raymond Chandler at the Spenders. He was heavy and bespectacled, with a greyish, mottled complexion which I now realise was due to illness, and throughout lunch he fixed me with what seemed to be a stare of fury and hatred. Over-sensitive though I was, I had never felt so actively disliked before. Over the cheese, Chandler suddenly barked, "Nehru's a fool!"

I remained, as usual, silent. Chandler said, "He's selling out to the Communists everywhere." He then fixed me with an icy eye and demanded, "Isn't he?" I replied truthfully that I had no idea. Chandler snorted, and didn't speak to me after that.

These lunches at the Spenders' sophisticated and toughened me. They also introduced me to people I would never otherwise have met at that time. They introduced me to literary life. Yet, inwardly somehow I felt that this life was not the life that writers should lead, the pain must be lost and the hard battle with words, when you wanted a house, a family, friends, love, possessions. I didn't really understand that writers are people, and that one day I should want and have these things myself, and be forced to justify them to the young. •



# The pleasure principle

*Dr Prakash Kothari provides new insights into the orgasmic experience*

**P**ornography and contemporary fiction tend to portray sex as a competitive act. Its reward: orgasm—a mind-boggling and psychedelic experience. Anything less is disappointing, even inappropriate. There is no place for frigidity and ejaculatory incompetence. The world of sex is made out to be frighteningly black and white. Either you make it or you don't.

Oddly enough, enlightened medical opinion has discovered that if anything has been taking the zing out of love-making it is this 'competitive' view of sex. There are no norms in love-making. Dr Prakash Kothari, MB Ph.D., the high priest of Indian sexology, has gone one step further, contending that medical research has not even managed to conclusively establish whether orgasm involves specific physiological reflexes. For instance, although it has been claimed that without vaginal contractions orgasm cannot occur in females, recent clinical research in the West suggests that for women orgasm is a diffused sensation not necessarily associated with vaginal upheavals.

So, what is orgasm? Kothari, in his latest book *Orgasm: New Dimensions* attempts to explore this intriguing question. He starts off by defining orgasm as "an explosive, cerebrally encoded muscular response at the peak of sexual arousal elicited by psychological stimuli, the pleasurable sensations of which are experienced in association with dispensable pelvic physiological concomitants". The last part of the definition is interesting. Kothari, after reviewing medical literature, concludes that it is difficult to say which coital events are truly orgasmic.

In males, for example, emission and ejaculation, we are informed, are not indispensable or synonymous with orgasm. Similarly, studies have shown that the orgasmic experience is less specific, and more subjective, in women than in men. What Kothari seems to be driving at is that the world of sex is not as black and white as it is made out to be. It is complex. And if there is any single most relevant aspect of sex, it is pleasure. Kothari

feels, therefore, that sexual dysfunctions should be defined in terms of the ability or inability to achieve pleasure, and ultimately orgasm, whatever its precise form might be.



**Dr Prakash Kothari: leading sexpert**

Kothari's new classification of orgasmic dysfunctions is radical in the sense that it is centred on orgasm *per se*, is clear, specific and applies to both men and women. In the most simple terms, the disorders are classified thus: early orgasmic response (EOR), delayed orgasmic response (DOR), impaired orgasmic response (IOR) and absent orgasmic response (AOR).

This classification might appear too simplistic but it allows for a new approach to diagnosis and treatment. The old terminologies (which include such terms as premature ejaculation) and theories are not supported by latest neurobiological findings and treatment based on them is not necessarily effective. For instance, the old school sexologists Masters and Johnson dealt cursorily with DOR in women and tended to emphasise EOR in men. According to Kothari's schema, whether a male partner should be treated for EOR or the female for DOR would depend on the situation, and not on a pre-conceived approach to the sexual act.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Kothari's findings relate to "sexual grounding", an aspect of human sexuality that has largely been ignored. He writes that one of the most crucial aspects of sex is the process by which stimuli, whether psychological or physiological, are interpreted. "When the cognitive process interprets stimuli inputs as sexual, it is said to have undergone sexual grounding." This "grounding" determines whether a particular set of stimuli will give rise to arousal or not. In that sense, an individual's personal history has everything to do with sexual response, even the type of orgasm.

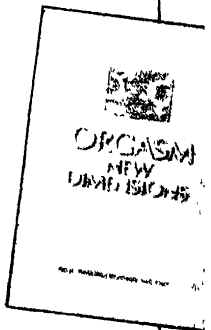
This is more pertinent in the case of women, for whom orgasm is, to an extent, a learned activity. In Kothari's view: "Female orgasmic capacity can be viewed as a potentiality that may or may not be developed by a given culture. The capacity to learn a total orgasmic response is present differentially in all women."

The book, though addressed primarily to a medical audience, makes interesting reading for even the non-technical reader. Those who are keen on picking up intriguing practical tips than on the theoretical aspects of sexual dysfunctions, will not be disappointed either. There are interesting sections on the fabled 'G' or Grafenberg spot, which women are supposed to possess and which, if stimulated, allegedly brings about convulsive orgasm and female ejaculation.

There is also a long chapter, complete with EEG (Electro-Encephalogram) recording, on multi-orgasms. And if there is any one message the book contains beneath the mass of medical arguments, it is simply that sex is more complex than you think. Orgasm is something of a conundrum. The main point about sex is: have fun. ●

**Indrani Banerjee**

*Orgasm: New Dimensions* by Dr Prakash Kothari. Published by VRP Publishers, Bombay, 1990. Price Rs 900.





**O**ver the last fortnight, India's first magazine for homosexuals, *Bombay Dost*, has been, rather saucily, landing on the desks of select industrialists, businessmen, advertising and print media men. Through the mail, free of cost. And mailing it to these ostensible closet queens is the chairman of the board of editors of *Bombay Dost*, who desires anonymity for the present ("I have no problem about revealing my identity, but I would like someone else to do it first or else I'll be accused of hogging all the publicity.") Says he: "The reason I have mailed out some copies of our inaugural issue to these people is because we all know they are gay. But, if they do not wish to be part of the movement they will, at least, at some point in the future, send *Bombay Dost* a few cheques."

Optimism at *Bombay Dost* currently runs high, though it is, admittedly, inversely proportionate to the finances. Each issue of the magazine costs approximately Rs 9 70 to produce, claims the chairman, but is sold at Rs 5 per copy. The inaugural print order of the quarterly 1,250 copies. "But we are very, very hopeful," says the chairman, "for all of last week there have been telephone calls. Gulbarga wants a hundred copies, Vizag 25 copies, Hyderabad 150 copies."

The working capital for the inaugural issue of *Bombay Dost* came from what could be described as a cooperative effort, with the chairman himself contributing a large amount. He elaborates, "Some time back we had one of our regular get-togethers in a Ghatkopar (a Bombay suburb) restaurant. We charged, as we always do, for the food and drinks and then added a 'cover charge' of Rs 5 per head." The cover charge became part of the working capital.

Securing advertising revenue, however, is not going to be that easy, given the editorial content and target readership of the magazine. But, at the moment, this isn't fazing the editorial board of *Bombay Dost*. Comes the cheerful response "Yes, yes, we know

The magazine comprises 16 pages, seven of which are in Hindi, the content of these being translations from the nine English pages ("we will always be bi-lingual") Editorial matter in the main English section includes a detailed story on AIDS. Slated for future issues are indepth articles on condoms (how to sift the good ones from the bad ones, how to wear them; and if they hurt what lubricants to use, etc.), career and counselling columns, a section on what's in and what's out in the gay world, a restaurant guide for various cities ("there are so many restaurants which treat us badly only because we are gay"), and a legal advice column tentatively titled "Crimeless Crime"

"Often enough we are arrested by the cops for suspicious cruising, even if we aren't. They have to complete

their arresting quota for the day, so they land up at our regular places and book us under Section 377 of the IPC. This Section happens to be such an exquisite instrument for blackmail that we can even go in for as much as 10 years. Though, thank God, such persecution doesn't spiral to higher levels all the time. In the sense, I have seen judges throwing out cases in sheer embarrassment," confides a homosexual.

**T**wo pages of *Bombay Dost* have also been handed over to the lesbians. There are four women (out of a total membership of 10) on the editorial board. Among the board members are included an engineer, a few chartered accountants, a businessman's son who holds a Ph D, and a journalist (the chairman himself). "I'm not too happy with this segregation of the lesbians," admits the chairman. "It's a bit like those 'special' talk-down sections for women in





newspapers But then, how can they be interested in special articles on condoms, except for that occasional lesbian who indulges in bisexual relationships? So, there are two pages for them, these they must fill with what they think will help them. As it is, an ambitious woman in India is seen as a threat, she is never forgiven Then, you can imagine what it is like for a career-oriented lesbian who can't even go out cruising, the way we do late in the night "

The lesbians, apparently, put up a bit of a fight when the magazine was named *Dost*. Why not *Saheli*, they asked But *Dost* it remained, the decision arrived at after everyone agreed on the generic advantage of the word over *saheli*. Also, it was pointed out that there are more homosexuals in India than lesbians Claims a gay activist, "At a conservative count there are 40 million males in the country responding to homosexual stimuli." And many of them, according to the activist, are coming together under local umbrella organisations following the AIDS scare "For instance, some Marwaris have just got together in Calcutta to form the city's first gay club "

**D**espite such claims of increasing strength in high places, *Bombay Dost* is yet to secure its registration in the capital. "Oh there are enough of

us among the Delhi bureaucrats," retorts an editorial board member "But they are largely scared of being identified, they just look after their own interests Who needs them, those Gucci queens!"

Once registration is secured, *Bombay Dost* will enter into "reciprocal relationships" with the Panos Institute in London (a voluntary institution which has reportedly become the nerve-centre for AIDS information worldwide), the Gay Men's Health Crisis Centre in New York City (formed by Elizabeth Taylor and Co after Rock Hudson's death), Khush in Toronto, Shakti in London and Tri-kone in San Francisco

Later, the editorial board of *Bombay Dost* will function as a board of trustees and the trust will seek to enhance cultural ties with their brethren abroad. ("Maybe we will send some of our more talented ones to do a *mujra* in full drag or perhaps a nifty Helen number, this could even be part of our fund-raising activities here.") Funds raised will be earmarked for a hospital bed because of the lack of "caring medicare" for homosexuals and lesbians. "This has struck us deeply following the recent death of a young Bohra boy who worked in *The Times of India* response department We had warned him about AIDS, but he was already far too gone into mainline cruising, eight to twelve a day with the Arabs. He died a very, very horrible death, alone on a G T Hospital bed Even his parents didn't come to see him "

If further funds permit, there is even a plan for a "small apartment" somewhere in Bombay's suburbs. "We'll break down all the walls—otherwise it starts off the hanky-panky—and use the place as our focal point to meet, like a club that's our very own." It is also possible that the place may double as the *Bombay Dost* office since, at the moment, the editorial board members are working out of their homes and offices and the typesetter's place.

How the future will shape up depends on the money available And the availability of funds depends on the success of *Bombay Dost* which is already being regarded as the symbol of Indian homosexuals and lesbians coming out of the closet—slowly, but with an increasing degree of confidence. If things do improve, there can only be gay times ahead. •  
*Philde Virani/Bombay*



**Optimism at  
*Bombay Dost*  
currently runs  
high though,  
admittedly, its  
financial  
prospects  
aren't too  
bright**





# Who will win the World Cup?

*Take your pick from Italy, Holland and Brazil*

**W**ill it be a blitzkrieg that overshadows all? Will the local *Carbonieri* call the shots? Or, above all this din, will the samba set an unbeatable rhythm?

These are just three of the possibilities in the wide open field of the World Cup football competition, which will capture the attention of the whole world for a month beginning 8 June. Football is, after all, the most popular game in the world and, after the summer Olympics, provides the grandest show for spectators and television viewers across the globe. The 1986 World Cup had people from over 130 countries, including India, awake at different hours of the day and night, following the fortunes of the best footballing nations.

For a hundred years, football—considered by many to be an essentially plebian sport—has fired the imagination of sportslovers, young and old alike. A body-contact game which demands both brawn and brain, soccer has grown steadily over the years to its present strength of 158 member-nations of FIFA, the controlling body for the sport.

What gave the game its greatest fillip was the introduction and worldwide acceptance of professionalism. Clubs became companies and sponsors were only too eager to fund the clubs in return for a small spot on the player's apparel. Television also found a great avenue for income. Thus, several factors helped to make this the most popular spectator-sport all over



the world. For example, the combined viewership of cricket, tennis and golf—three of the other top professional disciplines today—would not equal that of soccer.

The World Cup is not merely the biggest prize in soccer. Although club competitions sometimes involve more money for individual players, there is nothing quite like representing one's country in football. More than the combined skills of the players, it is a fierce sense of nationalism that binds a team together and helps produce some of the best moments of soccer. There have been riots and, once, almost a war, over the fortunes of teams playing in this quadrennial tournament. In fact, no sport brings an entire nation together more than soccer, especially during the World Cup. Political differences, poverty, natural calamities—everything is forgotten for a month of overwhelming and irrepressible tension.

Playing under such circumstances can be very difficult for even the most talented footballer. But individual brilliance has been the key to success in the World Cup, time and again. Mario Kempes gave Argentina its first taste of success at home in 1978,



though that victory was tainted by the blatant fixing of their match with Peru—Argentina won 6-0, thus piping Brazil on goal difference to enter the final. In 1986, it was Maradona who stole the show and the cup for the same nation. There have been other stars who have captured the attention of the world with their brilliance, none more brilliant than Edson Arantes do Nascimento, who went by the name of Pele.

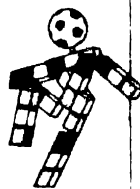
But World Cup triumphs have always been attributed to teams. And there have been quite a few who have won this competition, ever since Uruguay started by winning it at home in 1930. At home in 1934, Italy annexed the Jules Rimet Cup and then went on to prove this was no flash in the pan as even Mussolini pushed away the war clouds to follow his country's fortunes as it beat Hungary in the final at Paris in 1938.

Whether or not Italy could have notched a third successive victory and won the Jules Rimet Cup forever (which Brazil ultimately did) had there been a World Cup in 1942, is open to conjecture. But when the competition did resume in 1950, it was the original victor which re-surfaced.





(L to R) Holland's Geul, Argentina's Maradona, Brazil's Careca and the Dutch striker, Van Basten: the stars to watch



Uruguay beat Brazil in the decider to take the cup from Rio de Janeiro's giant Maracana stadium which was still being given the finishing touches when the last match in the final pool was being held

But that was the last of Uruguay and of the south Americans for more than four years. In Switzerland, it was Germany which, against the run of form, beat a Hungarian squad with Kocsis, Hidegkutti and, above all, Ferenc Puskas in its ranks. This was Germany's first-ever triumph in the World Cup, to be repeated 20 years later, at home

In the meantime, however, the Brazilians dazzled. They brought with them such an easy, innovative—and, above all, happy—approach to the game that they at once enthralled the world. The rhythm and grace were packed with a very keen football sense. And, in the company of Santos, Garrincha, Didi, Vava and Zagalo was a 17-year-old, whose World Cup debut in Sweden marked the birth of the world's greatest-ever footballer. In 1962, although Pele tore a thigh muscle in the preliminaries and was out of action, the Brazilians again conquered all before them to emulate the feat of

Italy and vie for the cup which would be theirs if they won it for the third time

But that was not to be, as Pele was pushed, pulled, kicked and bruised out of the competition in England and the fate of the Brazilians went with him. Here, it was the host nation that ultimately won albeit through a goal with is disputed even today, against West Germany

In 1970, however, the Brazilians

**This time, the field is wide open. While Argentina will continue to bank on Maradona, the Germans have realised it is now or never. However, the focus will be on Brazil, who have adopted a more defence-oriented approach to the game**

finally took home the Jules Rimet Cup, necessitating the presentation of another trophy by FIFA and bearing its name. And, four years later, the remarkably resilient West Germans—who had reached the semi-finals in 1934 and won the cup in 1954—came back to win the World Cup for the second time. Again, it was 20 years after their initial triumph. Later, in 1982 and '86, they reached the finals, only to lose both times

The 1978 story was different. This was the tournament after the one in West Germany which Holland lost after taking the lead. It was also the competition from which the mercurial Johann Cruyff withdrew. Nevertheless, Holland made it to the final and were unfortunate to go down to an Argentine team playing the game of its life. It was Kempes' tournament, though without the likes of Luque he would not have reached the pedestal on which he was placed, however briefly

In 1982, there was the great comeback by Italy who had barely scraped through the preliminaries. They improved with every match and, by the time they met the stoic Germans in the final, they had forged an unbeatable combination. But in 1986, it was a different story. After the heartbreak of 1982, Brazil had simply faded out in Mexico. This left the field clear for their arch rivals Argentina to confront West Germany, who again advanced, robot-like, to the final. And Argentina, with the irresistible Maradona guiding its fortunes, notched up their second victory

This year, however, the field is wide open. While the Argentines will continue to bank on Maradona, the Germans have realised it is now or never, as they bid for the third straight entry to the final. But the focus will be on hosts Italy, who had won at home back in 1954. However, this time the attention of the world will be focused on Brazil, who have decided to change their traditional, free-wheeling approach to a more defence-oriented combination

Above everything, however, is the excitement that soccer generates, especially at this highest level of the sport. The spectacle, the thrills and spills, the unexpected victories and the birth of new stars is what everyone looks forward to in a World Cup. This time around, in Italy, will certainly be no exception. •

**Arijt Sen**







# SUNDAY WEEK

BEGINNINGS 8 JUNE 1990 BY AMITALE

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



Your will-power, gumption and perseverance will see you through a lot of trouble this week. An old friend will be very helpful to you. The time, however, is not favourable for speculation and gambling.

Good dates: 3, 7 and 9

Lucky numbers: 4, 6 and 8

Favourable direction: North

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



Your fortunes are less propitious this week. Businessmen will be required to shoulder added responsibilities. Be on your guard against deceit. However, the time is ripe for romance. Take care of your health.

Good dates: 4, 6 and 8

Lucky numbers: 2, 3 and 7

Favourable direction: West

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This week will provide you with the opportunity to take a short holiday and thereby get away from the general pressures of life. The health of a family member may be a source for worry.

Good dates: 3, 5 and 7

Lucky numbers: 3, 6 and 8

Favourable direction: South-east

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



You are likely to encounter serious competition on the professional front this week. However, a secret association may be helpful at this point of your life. But check extravagance.

Good dates: 5, 6 and 9

Lucky numbers: 4, 6 and 9

Favourable direction: South

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



Promotions or transfers are in the offing for those in service. You may have to undertake a journey in connection with your work. Romance is on the cards. Keep an eye on your health.

Good dates: 6, 8 and 9

Lucky numbers: 5, 6 and 8

Favourable direction: North

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



This week might be a highly uneventful one. However, financial gains and business expansion are indicated. Be on your guard against deception. The domestic front will be calm. Keep an eye on your health.

Good dates: 4, 7 and 8

Lucky numbers: 6, 7 and 9

Favourable direction: East

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



You may not gain financially this week. However, your partner or spouse will provide you with timely help and advice. The time is not favourable for gambling or taking undue risks on your professional front.

Good dates: 3, 4 and 6

Lucky numbers: 3, 6 and 9

Favourable direction: West

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



Financial gains are in store for you this week. The time is also favourable for correspondence with someone you love. New friends and fresh interests will contribute to your happiness.

Good dates: 5, 6 and 8

Lucky numbers: 2, 5 and 9

Favourable direction: South

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



Hectic activity is in store for you this week. Your prospects are brighter than ever before. Your domestic front will provide you with all the encouragement and inspiration you need. Romance is well indicated.

Good dates: 4, 5 and 6

Lucky numbers: 1, 3 and 6

Favourable direction: North-west

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



An elderly person will be extremely helpful to you this week. Your professional front will take up a lot of your time and energy. The period is favourable for expansion and innovation.

Good dates: 6, 7 and 8

Lucky numbers: 2, 5 and 6

Favourable direction: North-west

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



You will gain unexpectedly this week. You might have to seek favours for your family. A fair measure of happiness is in store for you. You may gain through property or insurance matters.

Good dates: 3, 4 and 9

Lucky numbers: 5, 7 and 8

Favourable direction: West

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



Exercise tact and caution with your friends this week. Avoid any controversy or dispute. Women might receive presents. Watch your health. Children will be the source of joy. Your domestic front will be calm.

Good dates: 5, 7 and 8

Lucky numbers: 3, 6 and 9

Favourable direction: South

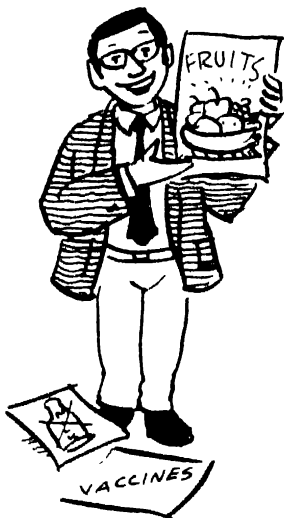
## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—VIRGO

Both the partners are very possessive. Being keen observers, they can analyse every situation. Only, the Virgo man should be careful about the Libra woman's feelings if he is critical of her in any way.



## Food for thought

■ With Vijaya Venkat, a Narmada Bachao Andolan activist, health activism has finally arrived in India. Vijaya believes that the present system of healthcare, which only depends on 'curing', is woefully inadequate. The key to good living, she feels, lies in the positive element of 'caring'. And that, in turn, implies a commitment to nutritious, healthy living, so that—ideally—the cared for body does not even need to be cured. As she explains, "Our body can handle itself as long as we provide it the right food." Factors apart from good eating habits—such as adequate air, sunshine and



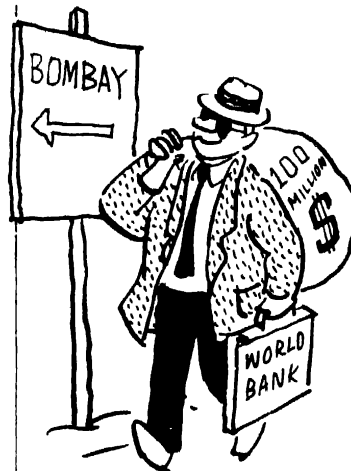
activity—also contribute to a person's well-being, she emphasises.

In putting forward her often radical views, Vijaya has managed to explode quite a few popular myths about food. For instance, milk, she says, far from being good for one is actually bad for health. It has a high sodium content that can lead to heart attacks and, if consumed in large quantities, can result in the formation of kidney stones. Similarly, vaccines are out, because they interfere with the body's natural immunity system.

Instead, sprouts and fruits are the things to adopt in your diet, she advises. She is eager to spread her views and make health and food consciousness more than just another fad. For this purpose, she has started an institute—the Bombay College of Health and Nutrition, where health activism is a way of life and more.

## Beautifying Bombay

■ The minister of state for environment and forests, Maneka Gandhi, can't remain out of the news for long. This time, she grabbed the headlines with the announcement that aid from the World Bank to the tune of US \$ 100 million would be made available to



the Maharashtra government to combat pollution.

Not content with just allotting funds, Mrs Gandhi has—in consultation with chief minister Sharad Pawar—drawn up an elaborate programme for the uplift of Bombay city. This includes improvement of basic amenities like the sewerage system as well as the air and water quality of the entire area.

Does this mean that help—of the concrete variety—is finally on its way for India's much-abused cities and towns? It would be wonderful if \$ 100 million could be spent on cleaning up other Indian cities and towns too. But even the most incorrigible optimist would have trouble believing that. For, the World Bank, generous as it is, must draw a line somewhere.

## 'Open' universities

■ The Centre has come up with yet another sop for the Kashmiris. All college students in the Kashmir Valley, irrespective of their religion, will be accommodated in institutions across the country. This decision was taken at a meeting in New Delhi attended by the minister of state for education, Chimanbhai Mehta, and the minister for Kashmir affairs, George Fernandes. In fact, the latter has already begun writing to the chief ministers of all states about the central government's decision.

Predictably, former Governor Jagmohan did not think it was such a great idea. He felt the decision to send students out of the Valley reflected badly on him. To appease him, therefore, it was also decided that while students would be sent to other states, educational institutions in the Valley would be kept open!

In the meantime, several professors, including the principal of the regional engineering college, have sought voluntary retirement. Others have fled the Valley and refuse to come back. So who will attend the 'open' educational institutions is not clear.

## MILESTONES

**ELECTED:** S.R. Bommal, former chief minister of Karnataka, as the interim president of the Janata Dal on 19 May.

**KILLED:** Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq, religious leader and chairman of the Awami Action Committee, by unidentified gunmen in Srinagar on 21 May. This was the second attempt on his life in the last five weeks.

**APPOINTED:** Surjit Singh Barnala, former chief minister of Punjab, as the Governor of Tamil Nadu on 22 May.

**RESIGNED:** Om Prakash Chautala, chief minister of Haryana, on 22 May, after the crisis within the Janata Dal over the Meham issue.

**ELECTED:** The Haryana deputy chief minister, Banarasi Das Gupta, as leader of the state Janata Dal Legislature Party on 23 May. Subsequently, he succeeded Chautala as chief minister.

**RESIGNED:** A.L. Jagmohan, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, on 25 May.



## Timed out

It seems to be the end of the road for the Congress' sometime favourite hatchet-man. Or, why would K.K. Tewari wait in vain for an audience at 10 Janpath?

Apparently, once he had finished with abusing the hapless Shankar Dayal Sharma, Tewari landed up at Rajiv Gandhi's residence, hoping, no doubt, to be congratulated for his facility with words. Or, at the very least, to be absolved of the blame in the fracas he was currently involved in.

But alas, things turned out very differently for the former information and broadcasting minister. He was kept waiting outside the Congress president's



**K.K. Tewari: end of the road**

office for a couple of hours, and then thrown out. Raja Gandhi, he was told, had no time for him.

—

## Bring on the computers

The Prime Minister is currently busy refurbishing his Race Course Road residence. And the

## HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

**Isn't it amazing how a man can go from being a fine administrator to a communal menace in five years? That, at least, is how Rajiv makes it sound.**

A JANATA DAL MP ON RAJIV'S ATTACKS ON JAGMOHAN WHO WAS ONCE A CONGRESS(I) FAVOURITE



**V.P. Singh: going hi-tech**

## BAROMETER

### How they rate in Haryana



**Om Prakash Chautala:** Still runs the state, though only by proxy now. His protestations of being a "disciplined soldier" of the party notwithstanding, he functions as the commanding officer in Haryana. Papa Lai is, of course, Field Marshal.



**General Das Gupta:** Is only a cipher: the real power resides with the Devi Lai/Chautala combine. Complains bitterly about the situation he finds himself in, but only when father and son are out of earshot.



**Harjit Singh:** A staunch supporter of Om Prakash, he has been rewarded with the post of deputy chief minister. Functions as the man on the spot, whom Chautala can rely upon to keep Das Gupta in order.



**Ranjit Singh:** Lobbied long and hard for the CM's post, but was kept out. Now stands completely isolated in Haryana politics and is likely to remain on the sidelines for a while.



**Suresh Singh:** The home minister in the Bararsi Das Gupta ministry, he is another Chautala mope in the Cabinet. If he performs his role well he will be rewarded in simple measure.

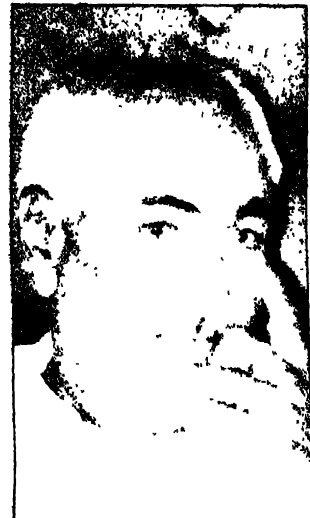
stallation of computers (exact number unspecified) in the Raja's (and the Rani's) bedroom.

This fascination with all things electronic doesn't end here. V.P. Singh has also taken to flashing his Casio pocket diary around in Parliament at the least provocation, seemingly engaged in complicated calculations.

Perhaps, we finally have a one-man answer to Rajiv Gandhi's computer boys.

## Look pa, no number-plate!

He may have been forced to accept the party directive on Haryana but nothing, and nobody,



**Om Prakash Chautala: the 'numbers' game**

can convince Om Prakash Chautala to abide by the rules of the game.

And we're not just talking politics here, either. Apparently, the former Haryana chief minister has been seen careering around on Delhi roads in a Mercedes Benz. Which is all very well, if it wasn't for one little oversight on Chautala's part. The Tau's eldest-born has forgotten to order a number-plate for his swank vehicle.



## Insecure Rajiv

■ Much is made of the security provided to Rajiv Gandhi. In fact, the former Prime Minister has virtually no security and anybody who wishes to pull a gun on him would have no difficulty getting past the sleepy guards.

A recent visitor to 10 Janpath sauntered into the deserted reception area and was waved through by the man at the desk. A bored looking policeman raised a quizzical eyebrow and then refused to use his metal detector on the grounds that "Iski to appointment hogi".

Inside 10 Janpath, there's just one safari-suited security man who spends a lot of time listening to what is probably a walkie-talkie (though it could be a transistor radio) and smiles benignly at all visitors without bothering to check their bonafides.



**Rajiv Gandhi: the guards are asleep**

Given the appalling state of his security set-up, Gandhi is probably lucky that all his enemies are inside the Congress and not outside.

## Will Munna's jailer resign?

■ Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel's little pro-Narmada drama in New Delhi has

HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

**Maneka Gandhi has a new slogan: keep India green. Jail a bear today.**

A CONGRESS(I) MP ON MRS GANDHI'S PERSECUTION OF MUNNA THE BEAR



**Maneka Gandhi: If you've gotta go, go now**

scandalised environmentalists but it has clearly won the Prime Minister's heart.

Despite the brave assurances he gave Baba Amte,

it is now reasonably certain that V.P. Singh will allow the Narmada project to go ahead. Nor is he likely to compromise on other environmental issues, as his decision to give the environment ministry a fully-fledged minister to control Maneka Gandhi demonstrates.

Many environmentalists believe that the time has now come for Maneka to do a L.C. Jain and resign from the government. The move is certain to win her widespread public support and VP will give in to get her to withdraw the resignation. And even if he doesn't, Maneka will have got so much acclaim for the

resignation that her political future will be assured.

So far, the other Mrs Gandhi has not decided on her course of action. But those who know her are betting that she'll choose to resign.

At any rate, it beats jailing poor Munna the bear while allowing your government to merrily destroy our eco-system.

## Maharaja and Thakur

■ In the midst of all the Janata Dal-BJP shenanigans, an interesting alliance within the Congress(I) has gone unremarked.

Madhavrao Scindia has actually made up with Arjun Singh, his *bete noire* in Madhya Pradesh politics.

What accounts for the change of heart? Apparently, Scindia is so convinced



**Madhavrao Scindia: better Arjun than Angre**

that Sardar Angre, the *de facto* chief minister of Madhya Pradesh will victimise him, that he is keen to at least unite the state Congress party behind him.

And Arjun Singh? Well, he feels that if he keeps in with Scindia, Rajiv will revise his opinion of him. At present, Rajiv sees Singh as a double-dealing, conspiratorial sort. But if he notes that Singh and Scindia are buddies, he might change his mind. ●

## THERMOMETER

*Where they stood on Jagmohan's ouster*

■ **George Fernandes:** The minister in charge of Kashmir affairs has never made any secret of his dislike for the Governor. And his concerted anti-Jagmohan campaign was one of the factors that helped the Raja make up his mind.

■ **Arun Nehru:** The commerce minister threw his not inconsiderable weight behind his protégé, but even that didn't prove to be enough. Despite Nehru's increasingly desperate defence, Jagmohan was out.

■ **Mufti Mohammad Sayeed:** Was a front-ranking member of the save-Jagmohan-at-all-costs campaign but all his efforts came to naught. It was only in keeping: the Prime Minister has stopped regarding his advice on Kashmir for some time now.

■ **B.G. Deshmukh:** Principal secretary to the PM, Deshmukh played an important role in convincing the Raja to let the Governor go.

■ **Narash Chandra:** Home secretary and brother of the new J&K Governor, the former RAW chief, Girish (Gary) Saxena. Chandra lobbied hard to get Jagmohan out. And succeeded.

Outraged



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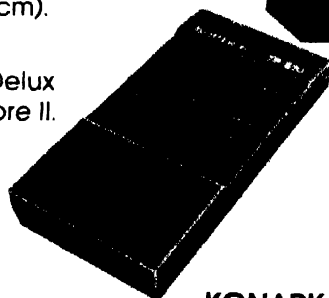
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**JAGMOHAN: IN MY DEFENCE**

# SUNDAY



## ANTHROPISHE ALTERNATIVES

and launches his campaign  
doubts





FOR LITTLE FINGERS  
THAT MAKE BIG ART.





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Rajiv Gandhi launches his comeback. But doubts persist about his leadership

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Former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan on his removal and what it means for the Valley



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V.P. Singh inducts a new team of sleuths



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**Cover transparency:**  
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## Masala and mythology

**T**he end of an epic (20-26 May) made interesting reading. B R Chopra's *Mahabharat* has spell-bound millions of viewers all over the country for the past 84 weeks. Truly, Sundays will never be the same again after the mega-serial

the portrayal of the character of Draupadi. Such slips in the interpretation notwithstanding, the serial is slickly made and deserves all the popularity it now enjoys.

Apart from excellent team work, Chopra's dream project can also boast of brilliant individual performances—Mukesh 'Bhishma' Khanna, Rupa 'Draupadi' Ganguly, Pankaj 'Karna' Dheer, to name a few. And above all, the golden voice of the late Hemanta Mukherjee (though nowhere mentioned in the credits) who recites the *shloka* before the serial begins will continue to haunt us long after the serial comes to an end. **Nanda Dulal Roy Chowdhury, Kharagpur (West Bengal)**

■ The correspondent has rightly observed that Sundays will never be the same

As the epic draws to a close every viewer, irrespective of his religion or caste, will miss the gods in action and the sound of the conch shells that heralded the beginning of 45 minutes of colourful mythology on television every Sunday.

**K. Chidanand Kumar, Bangalore (Karnataka)**

■ While everything has to come to an end some day, it is indeed unfortunate that TV's *Mahabharat* will conclude in a way that will destroy the spirit of the great epic. Expressing the gist of *Mahabharat* in a few lines, Rabindranath Tagore summed it up thus: "*Bi-jayer sheshe shey mahap-rayan, Shafal ashai bishad mahan/Udas shanti korutche dan/Churo mana-ber prane*" (that great departure after the victory, that great sorrow after the

the hollowness of a victory that claimed the lives of so many of their near and dear ones and caused widespread destruction and sorrow. It is indeed unfortunate that the actual end, which transforms this war drama into a sublime tale of suffering, should have been changed in Chopra's *Mahabharat*. Of the countless deviations committed by the director in the course of making this mega-serial, this is the most tragic.

**Susmita Bhattacharya, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

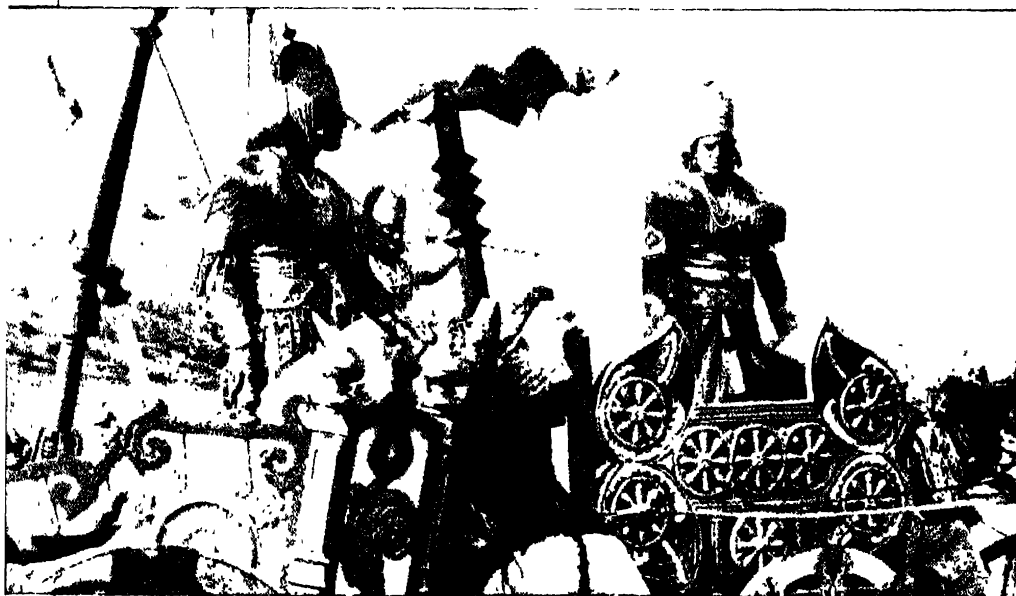
■ Minus the *Mahabharat*, Sunday mornings will be dull and dreary. Alas, good things come to an end as much as bad ones. And as B R Chopra's epic abracadabra comes to an end, one can only hope it will be replaced on Sunday mornings by something equally entertaining.

**Kalicharan Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

## Prejudiced

**T**he article on the language issue (*Mind your language*, 22-28 April) was interesting, but a little biased. It is absurd to suggest that English (and not Hindi) is the link language in India. Over 75 per cent of India can communicate in Hindi, while barely 5 per cent of India even understands English. This ratio, of course, varies from state to state but the over all picture remains the same. English is an elitist language imposed on Indians by the British with a view to creating a special class of opportunists who would be loyal to their *phirang* rulers.

I am no fanatic myself and I certainly do not believe in Mulayam Singh Yadav's policy, which seems to be—"To be Hindustani, speak Hindi only" but there is hardly any harm in knowing how to speak the national language. Surely Hindi is more



A scene from *Mahabharat*: the great entertainer

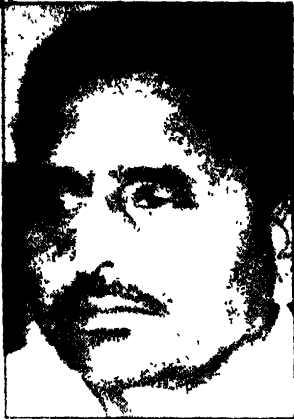
draws to a close in mid-June, because there is very little possibility that any serial will ever match Chopra's *magnum opus* either in technical skill or in the quality of acting.

It is true that the serial generated a fair amount of controversy—particularly as a result of the inclusion of Lord Krishna's childhood as part of the epic and

again in the absence of the much sought-after serial *Mahabharat*. As a matter of fact, the serial even beat *Ramayan* in terms of popularity and continued to top the viewership charts in spite of the renewal of its rival epic in the form of *Uttar Ramayan*. There is no doubt that as far as technical skill is concerned, Chopra has scored over Sagar

achievement of success is spreading the everlasting message of peace among mankind. The Pandavas would not have been the great epic heroes they are if they had lived happily ever after, content to get their kingdom back and unconcerned about the havoc caused by the battle of Kurukshetra. They were sensitive enough to realise





**Mulayam Singh Yadav:**  
only Hindi

Indian than English.

*Semir Marx Mahajan, New Delhi*

■ The attitude of the UP chief minister towards English as a medium of instruction is indeed shocking. Today, English is as essential as the different Indian languages, especially because it acts as a link language in our multilingual society and destroys the north-south divide. Even illiterate people often use a number of English words in their speech, such as, glass, chair, table, etc. Will the chief minister now compel us to use *shudh* Hindi versions of these words?

*Doyanidhi Benia, Berhampur (Orissa)*

## The babu syndrome

**C**ongratulations for the incisive analysis of the "babu syndrome" which is the sole cause of our national malaise. Producing only files and hot air these overfed drones gorge on the blood, sweat and tears of the hapless mortals under them.

Being rulers who neither see nor feel, nor know, but flow through public scorn like mud from a muddy spring of perks and privileges—sans accountability, sans responsibility so utterly unlike the ideal bureaucratic framework which our leaders dreamt

of. No nation has prospered with a corrupt and parasitic bureaucracy—neither will India.

*G.I.D. 'Souza, Bangalore (Karnataka)*

■ The seamy side of the IAS highlighted in your feature surely exists. But the impression you give that this is all there is to the service, is definitely misleading. In sharp contrast those officers who on transfer have refused to quit their bungalows until their potato crop is ready for harvesting, I can point to others who have packed their bags without fuss and gone on transfer 16 times in 20 years rather than give in to the will of the powers that be. There are joint secretaries who refuse to avail themselves of the influence it takes to get a three-bedroom house on Humayun Road, and have spent more than ten months after their appointment in "transit accommodation"—namely two tiny rooms in Pragati Vihar hostel. A service which has produced the likes of P S Appu and M N Buch (who resigned from service rather than take wrong decisions), cannot be entirely corrupt.

After 25 years in the IAS, I can vouch for the fact that even today it contains, at all levels, officers whose integrity is beyond question.

*S.S. Rizvi, New Delhi*

**A typical babu: not all are corrupt**



## Discriminatory attitude?

**E**very Indian it seems needs to be a relation of the Mufti, so that when the time comes he or she will be saved from the hands of the terrorists. But if the unfortunate victim is not so privileged? What then?

Ask Haq and Khera (*The hour of the gun*, 22—28 April).

The Indian Government went to the extent of releasing five dreaded militants to free Dr. Rubaiya. We support the government, as

Sikhs) who were terrorised by the militants and finally compelled to leave the Valley. Their only fault: they were a symbol of India in the terror-ridden state.

Notwithstanding the claims of the correspondent, those killed in paramilitary and police firing were by no means innocent. But the 40 odd people killed by the terrorists were in no way involved in the political mess that has now engulfed the state and were killed simply to scare non-Muslims and to establish the militants' illegal authority over all those in the Valley, who do not subscribe to the rule of the gun.



**A troubled area in Srinagar: the end game**

a life was saved, whatever be the cost. But what steps did the government take to save the Kashmir university vice-chancellor Musheer-ul-Haq his secretary Abdul Ghani and H M.T. general manager H.L. Khera. Every Indian has the right to ask the government if there is any difference between the lives of Rubaiya Sayeed and these three unfortunate men? And if the answer is no, then why were they not given equal treatment?

*Kajal Guha, Jharsuguda, (Orissa)*

■ It is indeed unfortunate that the story does not focus enough attention or show concern for the one lakh members of the minority community (including

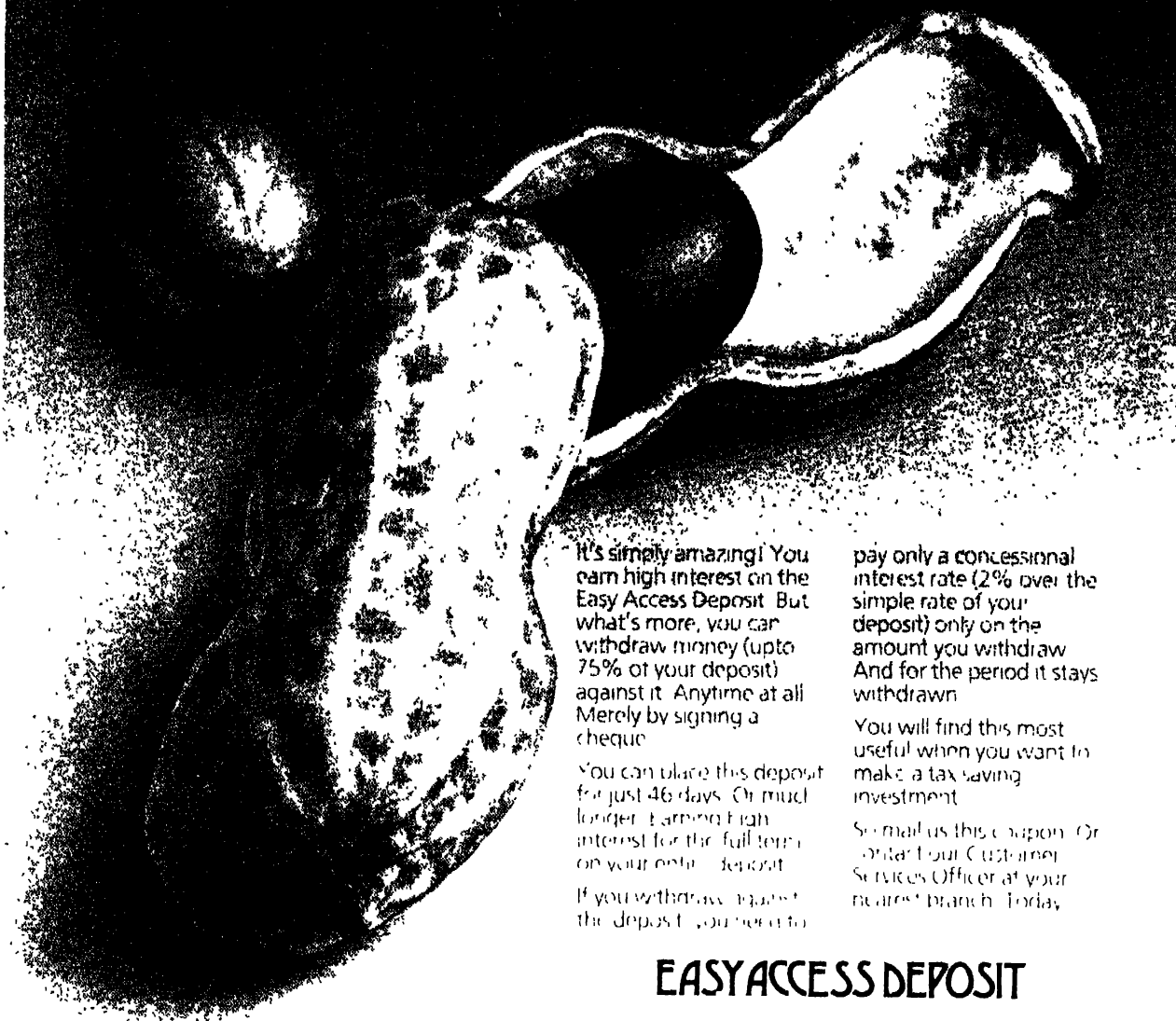
Moreover every individual thus killed, every innocent shopkeeper and government employee, was dubbed informers—a dubious allegation that formed an excuse for their persecution.

It is therefore hardly surprising that hundreds of Kashmiri Hindus (or Sikhs) had to leave everything they had earned, their homes, their belongings only to become refugees. Being a real victim of the situation I know how terrifying it is for anyone to give up everything that one has always held so dear. It is high time something drastic was done to cut the terrorists to size. ●

*Anil Saraf, Talab Tillo Refugee Camp (Jammu)*



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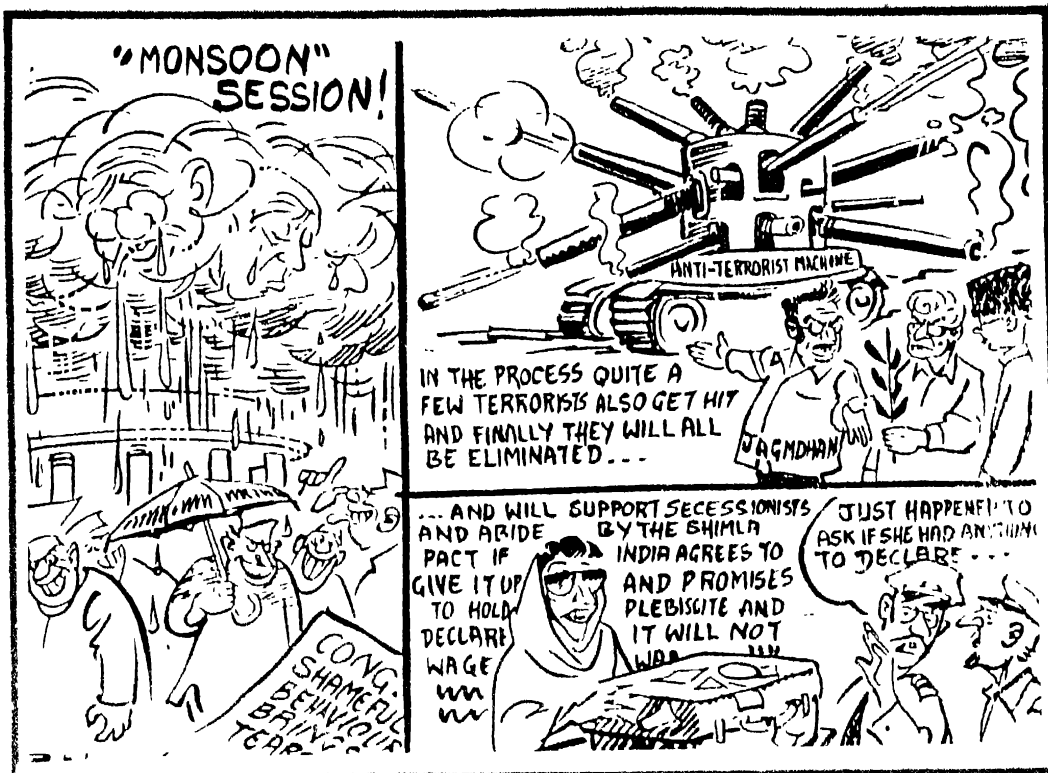
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R.K. LAXMAN/THE TIMES OF INDIA



■ In an age of decreasing military conflict throughout the world, it would be a great tragedy if India and Pakistan, two vital democracies, should choose to settle their differences with the gun rather than through peaceful discussion and compromise.

**GEORGE BUSH, United States President**

■ Disinformation is going on a large scale in regard

to Kashmir. Truth is being crucified... truth is bitter. Some people do not want to listen to the truth.

**JAGMOHAN, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir**

■ No doubt that the act of firing on a funeral procession was bad, but the removal of the Governor was not a solution to it and the whole matter could have been probed by higher authorities.

**L.K. ADVANI, BJP president, on Jagmohan's resignation**

■ How can we accept Indian sovereignty over Kashmir when we are fighting to eliminate it?

**AMANULLAH KHAN, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front**

■ But God protect us from politicians. They tie a goat to water and a fish to the stake. You don't know what they will say or do.

**MAHENDRA SINGH TIKAI, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader**

■ Tikka Khan has been asked to leave Kashmir, but unfortunately, Yahya Khan continues to run the government in Delhi.

**M.J. AKBAR, Congress(I) MP**

■ V P Singh talks of value-based politics. I have known him for 32 years. I know his values.

**R.K. DHAWAN, Congress(I) MP**

■ The ruling party should not think the Opposition is a destabilising force. What is wrong if the Opposition wants to destabilise the ruling party? Destabilisation of

the government is not the destabilisation of the country.

**ZAIL SINGH, former President of India**

■ The so-called 'clear-cuts' like Fotedar and Satish Sharma helped bring Rajiv Gandhi down. I don't follow any clear-cut road to disaster.

**V.P. SINGH, Prime Minister, on why there seems to be no clear cut direction of his party**





# Divided they fall

*V.P. Singh may find himself in deep trouble if he doesn't make up with the Tau*



Even self-fulfilling prophecies need time to mature. However, barely 24 hours after the dispatch of my column warning against the dangers of alienating the deputy prime

minister, the man in question struck back ferociously. We *commentarywallahs* are usually tickled pink when our political star-gazing turns out to be even 50 per cent accurate. Alas, in this case, I get no satisfaction in being proved right. It is my side which is batting.

Mr Devi Lal fired his first salvo in *The Times of India*. He told the paper that he felt "betrayed" by the Prime Minister who had failed to protect his "faithful *wafadaar*". Shorn of verbiage, this means that the Haryana patriarch holds VP personally responsible for making his son resign. But the real menace was attached to the rider. He noted that while he would do nothing to upset the life of the National Front government, he couldn't make a similar promise about V.P. Singh. "The people will never forgive us if we bring the *sarkar* down," he said, explaining his devious dual strategy.

Both statements spell cyclonic turbulence for the National Front, and particularly for its beleaguered leader. Mr Devi Lal has been persuaded that the Prime Minister himself led the campaign for the ouster of his son. So, in the wafer-thin professional relationship between the two, a personal, or rather family, element has been introduced. Mr V.P. Singh, unfortunately, is in no position to claim that it were his Cabinet colleagues, or public pressure, or both, that forced his hand since he has overtly and covertly taken full credit for cleaning up the Meham mess. The deputy prime minister, understandably, now no longer feels the need to keep the party leadership undisturbed.



**Devi Lal (left) and V.P. Singh:** The proposition that the Tau is a paper tiger is facile. Within the party, the deputy prime minister is certainly no paper tiger. In a 15-round contest with the MP from Fatehpur, he is likely to emerge winner, albeit on points

Although *The Times* interviewer did not specifically pose the question, I suspect that if in the process of dethroning V.P. Singh, the government is also dethroned, Mr Devi Lal would willingly pay that price. Thus, all the talk of "people not forgiving" is so much hot air. For Om Prakash Chautala's father, the Prime Minister is a man who has to be urgently cut down to size. If the government falls too—well, tough luck. At any rate, it is virtually impossible to destabilise the leader of the ruling party in a parliamentary democracy and not destabilise the government, he or she leads in the bargain.

**T**he speed with which Mr Devi Lal has gone public with his intentions suggests that the deputy PM is not going to hang around planning his offensive for an attack to be mounted six months hence. Hostilities have already begun. They can only get bloodier.

Would Devi Lal have revealed his revenge plan so swiftly if the results of the Darba Kalan byelection had not so whoopingly endorsed him and his son? I doubt it. Chautala's critics, both in New Delhi and in Haryana, were desperately hoping for a poor showing. Defeat was perhaps too optimistic.

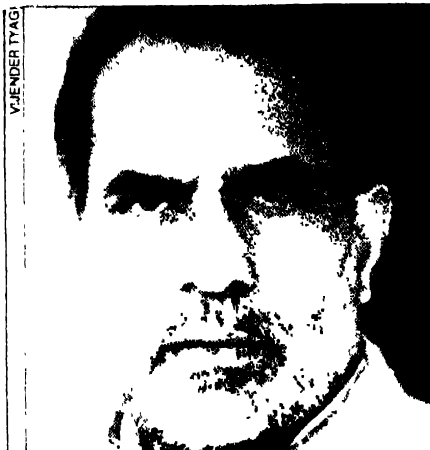


an expectation, but a small majority, say of 7,500, would have weakened Devi Lal's hand considerably. Alas, a 54,000-vote victory in a contest where all the other candidates lost their deposits can only be seen as an unqualified triumph.

Perhaps this may be a good moment to pause and consider—not the scale and magnitude of the Meham election frauds—but the culture that made them possible. There is enough independent evidence to confirm that the shameful incidents—including one murder—did occur. That the Devi Lal clan bears a major responsibility for most of these incidents is also incontestable, indeed it is more than likely that the Chautala family was directly involved in intimidation and general *adagiri*. However, we forget at our peril, that in Haryana, politicians across the board are by and large crooked and two-faced, and elections, whether local or national, are sought to be manipulated by all parties. Doubtless, Devi Lal and progeny represent the unacceptable face of Haryana politics. But Messrs Bhajan Lal, Bansilal and Dangi are not paragons of virtue either.

The citizens of Haryana understand this better than most of us. There is no other explanation for Chautala's thumping victory, five days after he resigned, and in a sense accepted blame for Meham Mark I and Meham Mark II. It is inconceivable that the electorate of Darba Kalan was unaware of the happenings in the other constituency, but they voted for Chautala with a vengeance in an election that was by all accounts transparently fair. Were they trying to tell us something? Were they passing judgement on the thunderings of leader-writers and value-based politicians? Considering what they were offered, did they in fact make a shrewd choice? How come no one is talking about the 'native intelligence' of the voters of Darba Kalan?

Even as I write, Devi Lal has plunged the party into two fresh crises (we can from now on expect a crisis a day). One is major, one minor. But, both are aimed at undermining the authority of the Prime Minister. Whoever actually obtained the signatures of the 50 Janata Dal MPs on the memorandum against the Mufti—Santosh Bharatiya's name in this connection doesn't make much sense—we can be sure that it was inspired by



**Chandra Shekhar: Wasting no time. Swiftly moving in as co-conspirator**

Devi Lal. Observe how swiftly Chandra Shekhar has moved in as a co-conspirator. You can be sure that soon the chief ministers of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar will be invited to join the bandwagon. The deputy prime minister's sudden and public show of affection for Charan Singh means that strenuous efforts are on to woo the industry minister. Altogether, we can expect to see a powerful conglomeration of Cabinet ministers, chief ministers, MPs and MLAs captained by the strong man of Haryana, and ranged against V P Singh.

Mr Devi Lal's championing of the Janata Dal interim president's case is not fortuitous either. S R Bommai got his job in the first place, thanks to the exertions of the deputy prime minister. Now, his insistence that Bommai, not Ramakrishna Hegde, lead the party's delegation to China is of a piece with his advocacy.

They were some who advised V P Singh to take firm action against Om Prakash Chautala and to "finish off" Devi Lal. According to this school, the Chaudhary is a paper tiger who by bluff and blackmail has managed to foster the notion of his own indispensability. Happily, he is now exposed, wounded and on the run. Swift and terminal surgery will quickly put him out of mischief. Even if there is some blood-letting, it will be a small price to pay for ridding the party and the government, of a congenital and treacherous wrecker.

It is an attractive proposition. If the deployment of forces had been in favour of the Prime Minister, he would recommend it unreservedly.

But, for starters, the proposition that Devi Lal is a paper tiger is facile. Perhaps he is despised by the readers of the *Indian Express* and *India Today*, but as the voters of Darba Kalan have shown, he is still a force to be reckoned with in large parts of north India. Moreover, within the party, the deputy prime minister is certainly no paper tiger. In a 15-round contest with the MP from Fatehpur, he is likely to emerge a winner, albeit on points.

Nevertheless, as a hypothetical exercise let us speculate on how events would develop if both combatants declared war. Supposing in this war, V P Singh did begin to marginalise Devi Lal, it would mean that nearly all his creative energies and manifest talents would be utilised in planning and implementing the mechanics of this battle. The business of governance would have to take second place. And if the Prime Minister did achieve his goal in a couple of years, it would be at the cost of the prime ministership, which by then would be in such a shambles that he would, at best, be perceived as a well-meaning incompetent.

It is much more likely, of course, that Devi Lal will either "finish off" V P Singh or engage him in a protracted fight in which there are no winners, match drawn, as it were. Such a result would be equally catastrophic for the PM because, unlike his opponent, he has to keep an eye on the nation and periodically assess his chances of re-election.

Actually, there is only one option for V P Singh. He must make up with Devi Lal. The Prime Minister is a self-confessed master of the "art of managing contradictions". Here is a real test for him, one which he must take if he has any instinct for self-preservation. Doubtless, he will be told that any conciliatory gesture would amount to losing face. Those who give him such advice are not his friends.

In public life there is nothing reprehensible about unholy wedlock. Democracies from Australia to Canada are strewn with examples of bitter foes contained by the rules of the game. There is no reason to believe that Devi Lal's ambitions cannot be legitimised within the National Front. The need of the hour is for truce talks to be initiated. All supporters of this government will wish Godspeed to such endeavours. ●



# "I am heartbroken"

*Former J&K Governor Jagmohan on his removal and what it means for the Valley*

*Unperturbed by criticism, the recently nominated member of the Rajya Sabha, Jagmohan, stands by every step he took as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. "I think what I did was absolutely correct and justified," he asserts. Jagmohan says he has entered Parliament to be able "to tell the country the truth about Kashmir" and restore the sanctity and "spirit of our institutions."*

*However, he is upset about not being permitted to have his say in Parliament. "All I wanted to say is that a panel of Supreme Court judges should be appointed to go into all aspects of militancy in Kashmir," he says. "And my tenure as Governor should also be judged by them."*

*He is confident that such an enquiry would absolve him and, eventually, the country will realise his worth. Meanwhile, he is resigned to living as an MP in Delhi, under heavy security.*

**SUNDAY: Why did you resign as the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir?**

**Jagmohan:** That was a matter decided by the central government. It was one of those things that came about. I would not like to go into it now.

**Q: You were supposed to administer the healing touch to the state. What happened?**

**A:** When I went to Srinagar, I declared that my role would be that of a nursing orderly. My job would be to nurse the state back to health, with care and compassion and everything else it needed. That is what I strived to do. But there is a saying in Urdu that

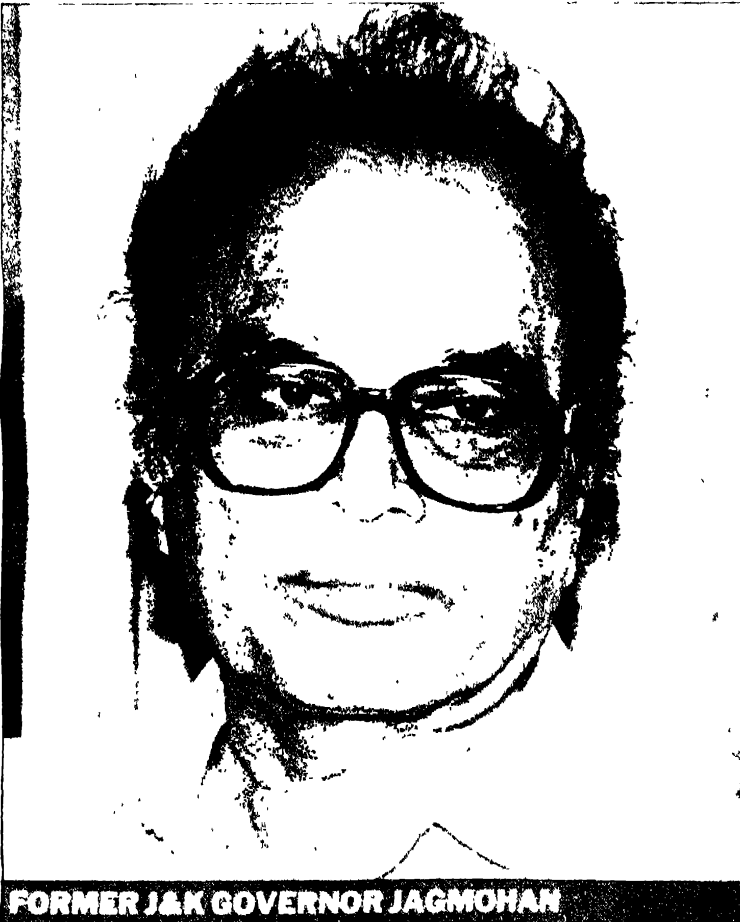
when you lose your way, you find a new one. I never wished to use harsh methods. But the terrorists had created an atmosphere in which any kind of developmental work was impossible. I made it my first aim to stop terrorism and then go in for massive development.

When I arrived in Srinagar, there were terrorists all over the place, anti-India slogans on every wall, JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front) flags everywhere and all sorts

of things were going on in the name of terrorism. Even government officials were crossing over to Pakistan and coming back. I put an end to all that. During my four months, I seized about 100 Kalashnikovs, vast quantities of other arms, explosives, grenades and ammunition. When Pakistani mobs tried to cross over into Kashmir, they were shot dead by our security forces. That put an end to illegal border crossings. It was a signal to Pakistan that they had better heed our warnings.

I prevented terrorists from holding a ceremony which they had invited the Indian and foreign press to cover, in which they planned to declare Kashmir an independent state. That incident is worth writing a book about. I arrested the terrorists involved in the Rubaiya kidnapping case and other major terrorists. We broke their back. We caught hundreds of young men who had crossed over from Pakistan. Some of them even confessed on television that they had been trained in Pakistan in subversive activities.

As for the charge that I was too harsh, all I can say is that I had issued clear instructions to the police and security forces to adopt a humane approach. The home ministry files are full of letters from me requesting supplies of rubber pellets, water hoses, tear-gas shells and other such things to help the police control crowds without causing any casualties. I have clearly stated that the absence of these provisions was making it difficult to handle rioters.



**FORMER J&K GOVERNOR JAGMOHAN**

**"I don't mind being alone. I'd rather be alone and do what I feel is right than compromise my principles"**





**"I always meant to administer the healing touch. You can see the results: the terrorists were on the run, normalcy was restored"**

peacefully. This is all documented.

I had always meant to be a nursing orderly. I always meant to administer the healing touch. You can see the results: the terrorists were on the run. Normalcy was restored. And except for the shoot-out with the Mirwaiz Farooq processionists (the funeral procession of the religious leader on which the police opened fire), there was no major incident. In fact, Gen. Rawley wrote me a letter—which I am going to place in the House—in which he said I had the unique distinction of being the only person to have effectively tackled the problem of urban terrorism in such a short time. He was all praise for my house-to-house search method. I had ordered security forces to adopt this approach and, as a result of it, we were able to arrest hundreds of wanted men and seize huge quantities of arms and equipment.

That is why I said in the Rajya Sabha—and the Congress didn't allow me to speak there because they didn't want to hear the truth, but I said it later at my press conference—let there be a panel of judges of the Supreme Court to assess my work and go into the charges against me. Let them see for themselves what I have done. I will not judge myself. Let the judges do that. Let there be an independent judicial enquiry. And the truth will be known.

**Q: You said you needed two more months to restore complete normalcy and law and order in the state. Do you**

**think you could have achieved this if you had stayed on?**

**A:** I could have perhaps. The situation has improved considerably. It is not so alarming for the whole state. Jammu and Kashmir doesn't only con-



**FAROOQ ABDULLAH**

**"The people viewed the state legislature as unrepresentative. By dissolving the Assembly, I got rid of that grouse"**

sist of the Valley. There are Leh, Ladakh, Jammu also. The trouble is confined to only a part of Srinagar. And the security forces and the administration have proved that they can handle the situation.

**Q: But if it was terrorists you were getting at, why did your methods make you so unpopular? Why was there an uprising against you in the Valley?**

**A:** This is part of the disinformation being spread against me. The terrorists had encouraged the illusion that they enjoyed popular support by creating a fear psychosis. Also, it served the interests of Congress people who didn't want me to be appointed Governor to say such things because they were afraid I would expose them. So they kept saying that I am anti-Muslim and I am unpopular.

**Q: What is the nature of the terrorist movement? Is it confined to a section of the population?**

**A:** They are spreading terror. They kill people and then throw their bodies where everyone can see them. People are terrified and too scared to resist. So they build the illusion of mass support. If you can check their activities, the people will only be happy to live in peace.

**Q: You are reported to have said that every Muslim in Kashmir is a terrorist.**

**A:** That is pure disinformation. How can I say such a thing? I have said that I will sue the tabloid that printed that for the simple reason that nobody





from the magazine had come to me for an interview. They had not interviewed me.

**Q:** But then, even Rajiv Gandhi recently said that choosing you as Governor was a mistake because you were known for your rabidly communal stance. And this charge against you, people say, dates back to the Turkman Gate demolitions which you ordered during the Emergency.

**A:** Disinformation again. There was nothing communal about the Turkman Gate demolitions. In any case, if I was such a rabid communalist, why did the Congress government appoint me Governor of Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir in 1980 and 1984? I had a very good record in Jammu and Kashmir then. The people were all for me. How did I become so popular if I was a rabid communalist? It was the Congress government which appointed me first. How did I suddenly become a

BJP man?

**Q:** There have been allegations of rape and loot by securitymen while you were Governor. What do you have to say about these?

**A:** These are reports which were picked up from the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) findings, which were exaggerated. In any case, as a Governor, I cannot be held responsible for every act of every securityman. As far as I am concerned, I have always been for a humane approach. I had issued instructions to security forces to fire only when necessary.

**Q:** How do you explain the 21 May firing on Moulvi Farooq's funeral procession?

**A:** This is again a subject for a judicial enquiry. But according to what I have been told, the Moulvi's followers, being what they are, forcibly took away the body from the police. When

they were taking the body in a procession, some of them attacked a police post on the way. Seeing they were outnumbered and overpowered, an officer there abandoned the post. As the procession went on, it encountered another police post. The securitymen there had come to know of what had happened at the previous post, where policemen were attacked. So they resorted to the use of arms.

**Q:** Benazir Bhutto is said to have made a speech in Lahore, claiming that Jagmohan would become 'Bhag Mohan' because he would be forced to leave. Do you believe your removal has emboldened the terrorists in the Valley?

**A:** I suppose it has. Ms Bhutto was desperate to see me out of Kashmir because I was causing a great loss to her government. I had begun arresting Pakistan-trained terrorists and seizing their weapons, explosives and

MERAJ UD DIN



**"Ms Bhutto was desperate to see me out of Kashmir because I was causing a great loss to her government"**







ammunition. Each Kalashnikov costs no less than Rs 1,00,000. How long could Ms Bhutto afford to suffer the loss? It was her money going down the drain. You are right. My removal must have been welcomed by terrorists. That is why I am heartbroken.

**Q: Did you find the central government uncooperative?**

**A:** Not exactly. They did what they could. It is not correct to say that they did not cooperate with me at all.

**Q: Were you involved in the framing of the Kashmir policy while you were Governor?**

**A:** My job was different. The Governor's role is entirely separate from the central government's.

**Q: But the central government did step on your toes: what about your differences with the minister for Kashmir affairs, George Fernandes?**

**Wasn't he for a more humane socio-economic approach to the crisis?**

**A:** I was never against socio-economic steps. In fact, during my last stint as Governor of the state, I became popular for giving jobs to unemployed youth and carrying out developmental work. Only this time, it was my belief that no development would be possible in an atmosphere of terror. There was a demand to ensure retail outlets for apple-growers in Baramulla. My position was that the government would be wasting its money and time on such schemes because of the trouble in those parts. The terrorists would simply rob the people. I preferred to

first put a stop to terrorism and then go in for large-scale development work and socio-economic uplift.

**Q: Do you think it was a mistake to dissolve the Assembly? After its dissolution, you had to accept responsibility for every act of the government. The Assembly was a safety valve, wasn't it?**

**A:** Not at all. For two reasons. First, the people of the state felt deprived of their franchise in the last election. They viewed the state legislature as unrepresentative. Second, they believed the legislators were a corrupt lot. By dissolving the Assembly, I got rid of that grouse. I made sure the people did not complain about the Governor fostering a corrupt oligarchy. That also gave me a moral justification for the measures I planned to adopt to bring the state back on the path of normalcy.

**Q: Do you think your removal has paved the way for the return of Dr Farooq Abdullah to the helm in the state?**

**A:** The central government will have to decide whether to return to the corrupt and unrepresentative Assembly of the past or not.

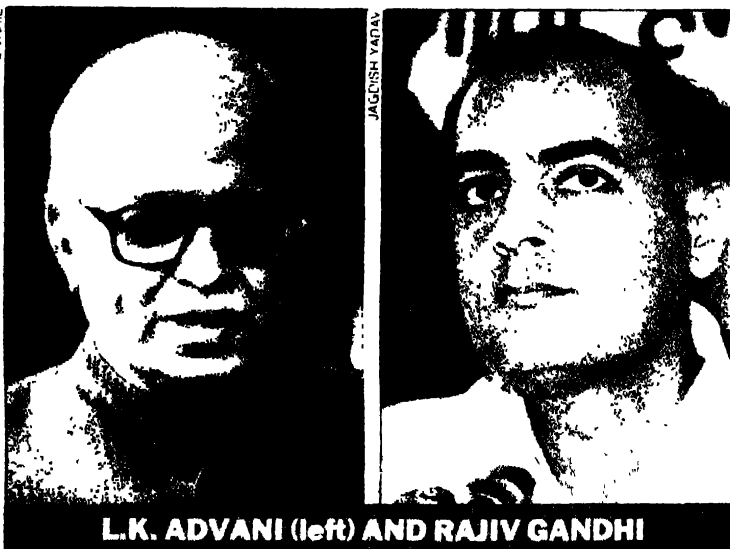
**Q: There was talk that you were upset about being removed from Kashmir and that you would turn down the offer of a Rajya Sabha membership. What made you accept it?**

**A:** I have chosen to become a member of the Rajya Sabha to be able to tell the country the truth about Kashmir. I would also like to contribute my mite to the revival of the spirit of our institutions. These days, our institutions—like Parliament—have been reduced to mechanical entities. Their most important part—their spirit—is missing. I want to help restore that spirit in them. This is going to be my aim as a member of the Rajya Sabha. I am not a politician. And I do not hanker for political office. Even this time, when I was sent to Srinagar, I didn't opt to go on my own. I was asked to go. And I took up the assignment to see what I could do to help settle the problem. Now, I want to restore the sanctity of our institutions.

**Q: What if you find yourself a lonely man in Parliament, just as you did in Kashmir?**

**A:** I don't mind being alone. I'd rather be alone and do what I feel is right than compromise my principles to have people follow me. •

**Interviewed by Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



**L.K. ADVANI (left) AND RAJIV GANDHI**

**"It was the Congress government which appointed me first. How did I become a BJP man?"**



# Killer on the run

*The Tamil Nadu and Karnataka police launch a massive operation to nab the dreaded sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan*

**I**t will easily go down as one of the biggest, and perhaps the most determined, manhunts in the history of contemporary India. For three months now, over a thousand police personnel of two states—Tamil Nadu and Karnataka—are scouting every corner of the 250-km Sathyamangalam-Bargur-Kollegal dense forest range for a man who has been eluding them for the last one decade—the dreaded poacher-turned-sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan. And it is indeed proving to be a costly search: the two state governments are spending as much as Rs one lakh a day to track down the fugitive.

But the cops have so far failed to lay their hands on Veerappan. And there are enough reasons for the police to draw a blank—in fact, they have very little information regarding the whereabouts of Veerappan and his gang members. Firstly, the area where the smuggler operates is virtually inaccessible—thick jungles cover the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border with the river Cauvery forming a natural boundary between the two states. Even a few years back, no police or forest personnel dared to enter the area. Veerappan and his men ruthlessly crushed all opposition—cops and foresters were beheaded and their bodies thrown into the Cauvery.

But the single most important factor that has come in the way of Veerappan's arrest is the popularity of the don among the villagers. Veerappan is



a Robin Hood to many of the poor peasants who live along the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border. Besides, since the state governments have done precious little to develop the area, the locals find it extremely difficult to eke out a living. Thus when Veerappan started his activities, it was a god-sent opportunity for them. In fact, Veerappan's men have employed a large number of villagers in the sandalwood smuggling business. Little wonder then, the locals do not cooperate with the police in tracking down the outlaw.

Veerappan's rise from a petty elephant poacher in the Seventies to one of the country's top smugglers is indeed legendary. He was, however, nabbed by the Karnataka Police in 1986 in Bangalore. But true to his style, he escaped from police custody, after bribing the cops. Since then, the sandalwood smuggler has gone on a rampage, gunning down policemen

and forest officials at will. In July 1987, Veerappan himself shot dead a Tamil Nadu forest ranger and a year later, he kidnapped three jungle guards and boiled them dead. His exploits have dazed all law enforcement agencies in both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and today, forest guards refuse to patrol the areas controlled by the notorious gang.

**S**andalwood smuggling is big business in large parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. And the people who have virtually monopolised this illegal trade mostly belong to the Padayachi Gounder community. The Padayachis are spread over the Mysore district of Karnataka and the Salem, Dharmapur and Periyar districts of Tamil Nadu—areas where costly sandalwood is produced. Apart from the fact that Veerappan belongs to the Padayachi community, his mentor during the early part of his life was the legendary





(Clockwise from far left) Shetty with his men; the Tamil Nadu police scouting the jungles; and, Veerappan: eluding the cops

poacher, Sevi Gounder, a man against whom there are at least 100 cases pending in different courts of the two states. And by the time he moved into the sandalwood jungles, Veerappan had made friends with those who mattered—politicians and police officials. In the last Assembly polls, Veerappan and his men had campaigned for Raju Gowda, the Congress MLA from Hanur in Karnataka, and Naachi Muthu, the former AIADMK member from Mettur in Tamil Nadu. Later, of course, both the politicians jumped off the Veerappan bandwagon and firmly denied any links with the smuggler. Veerappan hit back by sending a letter to the superintendent of police, Mysore, exposing his political mentors and agreeing to surrender if the two people who “used” him were arrested. The smuggler is also believed to have “good contacts” in the police and his gang has an excellent network of

informants, who keep Veerappan informed of any moves against him.

Towards the beginning of this year, the governments of both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu realised belatedly that Veerappan was more than just an elusive fugitive. For, by then, the smuggler had cleared most of the forest areas of valuable sandalwood. In February, the authorities of both the states launched a joint operation, codenamed Operation Snap, to nab Veerappan. Though the cops failed to arrest the kingpin of the timber trade, they managed to seize over 65 tonnes of the precious wood from the jungles of Sivakal.

The stepped-up police action dealt a severe blow to Veerappan and his band, making them more desperate. The gang destroyed government buses, looted a cooperative society bank and in a daring operation on 9 April, ambushed a Karnataka police party which was returning to their base camp at Male Mahadeshwara Hills after scouting for Veerappan in the dense jungles. Four policemen were shot dead and the rest severely injured.

The incident made the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments sit up. Soon after, Veerendra Patil, chief minister of Karnataka, formed a special task force to liquidate the deadly gang. The Tamil Nadu authorities followed suit. Today, the cops have virtually taken over the sandalwood forests of the two states, but Veerappan continues to elude them.

Though the Karnataka police was somewhat demoralised after the 9 April ambush, things have improved with the formation of the task force. Led by supercop K U Shetty, a former armyman and presently inspector-general of the Karnataka Special Reserve Police, the task force has been provided sophisticated arms like stenguns, machineguns and 9 mm carbines, apart from walkie-talkie sets, heavy-duty jeeps and even a helicopter to carry out sorties. Veerappan's gang too is rumoured to have long-range powerful guns. As Shetty predicted, “It will be a bloody fight to the finish if Veerappan confronts us. We are going deeper into the jungles to hunt out the smuggler.” For the last one month, Shetty and his commandos are on a trekking expedition through the dense forests, hoping for a chance encounter with Veerappan's band.

But Veerappan definitely has a distinct advantage over the task force. Born and brought up in the area, he is truly a man of the jungles. No wonder, the police is on a wild goose chase. Moreover, the smuggler has an efficient network of spies and the villagers inhabiting the forests often help out his gang with prior information about



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police movements. It is also rumoured that Veerappan has a pet dog and a monkey—they warn their master of approaching danger. The cops, on the contrary, are relatively new to the hilly terrain. Thus, even though Shetty and his men are well versed in guerrilla warfare, they have failed to make much headway. And, time is clearly running out for the members of the task force. In a few months from now, the monsoon will set in, making the jungles even more inaccessible. But Shetty hasn't given up hope. "We will not abandon the hunt. So far, all the breaks seem to be going his (Veerappan's) way, mainly because of the magnitude of the terrain he is operating in. With a bit of luck we will get him, dead or alive," he said.

**C**ompared to its Karnataka counterpart, the Tamil Nadu task force seems to have achieved some success. At the Mettur Dam camp office of the Tamil Nadu Special Police (TSP), commandant K. Gopalakrishnan said, "We are going to nab Veerappan soon. He can't last long." In the past three weeks, the TSP has shot dead at least four of Veerappan's close associates and arrested five more. Besides, the supply of arms to the gang has been plugged with the arrest of a gun dealer in Salem. In fact, the police force of the two states came close to nabbing Veerappan once. The smug-



**Naachi Muthu: Veerappan's target**

## Friends, now foes

*Why has Veerappan  
fallen out with his  
mentor, Naachi Muthu?*

**I**t is an impressive farmhouse on the outskirts of Kollathur village, around 60 kms from Salem in Tamil Nadu. The large villa is guarded round-the-clock by about a dozen toughs, who frisk every visitor. The house is owned by Naachi Muthu—a former

AIADMK MLA, who contested the last Assembly elections as an Independent but lost. And this is the house from where Veerappan used to operate not very long ago.

In fact, it is alleged that Muthu himself was a partner of Veerappan's smuggling operations. A top police official from Tamil Nadu confided that "Veerappan used Muthu's tractors and lorries for carting sandalwood." However, Muthu and Veerappan fell out over the sharing of the booty.

Earlier, the politician and the outlaw were great friends. In fact, villagers of Kollathur had once complained that they were being terrorised by Veerappan's gang into voting for Naachi Muthu.

Naachi Muthu was a leading forest contractor at the time when Veerappan started his smuggling operation. Muthu, however, vehemently denied that he had anything to do with Veerappan and his illegal business. "It is a canard spread by the DMK and the police to malign me," he asserted. In fact, Muthu claimed that he had even tipped off the police regarding Veerappan's whereabouts.

The former MLA is today on Veerappan's hitlist because Muthu reportedly refused to pay his gang protection money. Moreover, the smuggler believes that his mentor was behind the recent seizures of sandalwood by the cops. Muthu on his part has sought police protection, which, according to him, has been turned down. "I have written to the Prime Minister," said Muthu in desperation. "Our forces are all idiots. I now feel that only the army is capable of nabbing Veerappan," he added. A rare tribute to the might of the elusive sandalwood smuggler.



**Veerappan's territory: inaccessible**

gler was reportedly hiding at Kongarapatti, near his native village, Gopinatham. But just before the cops arrived, Veerappan and his gang fled the area. The police, however, arrested a number of the smuggler's sympathisers.

However, soon after Gopalakrishnan was given charge of nabbing

Veerappan, he ran into trouble. The cops were accused of harassing ordinary villagers and it was also alleged that the trigger-happy TSP commandant had gunned down innocents in fake encounters. But Gopalakrishnan seems least bothered. He has taken his job seriously and even watches western jungle movies on the video to get a

feel of his assignment.

But despite Shetty's and Gopalakrishnan's efforts, Veerappan is roaming the jungles as a free man. And the massive police operations in the past few months have only made a hero out of the smuggler. Till he unwittingly walks into the trap laid by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka police, the legend of Veerappan will only spread far and wide. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Male Mahadeshwara Hills, Gopinatham and Mettur**



# Man for all seasons

*What makes B.G. Deshmukh an indispensable aide of the PM?*

**A**t a time when bureaucrats have become tools in the hands of politicians, Bhalchandra Gangadhar Deshmukh, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, belongs to the vanishing tribe of upright and impartial civil servants. His wily and unobtrusive ways have earned him a place in the offices of two Prime Ministers. Behind Deshmukh's soft-spoken nature lies seasoned circumspection; he is acutely aware of what he should do to outlast a Prime Minister, and, for that matter, what he should not.

The day Vishwanath Pratap Singh took over from Rajiv Gandhi, Deshmukh, who had also served the former PM, was assured that he would be kept on in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), even though he had never asked to be retained. The reasons? He had never really identified himself with the Congress(I) regime. More important, he had disapproved of the investigations into the St Kitts accounts of V P Singh's son, Ajeya. And that was enough to convince the Raja that he was an ideal officer to have around: brave, dutiful and objective.

But it was his native Maratha wisdom that did the trick. "Like Gopi Arora, Deshmukh read the signals clearly," recalls an officer who has worked with him. Deshmukh had been made principal secretary to the former PM in end-March 1989, nine months before Rajiv Gandhi's fate was decided in a general election. When he put his crucial remark on the St Kitts file, it still wasn't clear whether V P Singh would win. But Deshmukh and Gopi Arora had a hunch he would—and insisted it wasn't a good idea to investigate Ajeya Singh's accounts.

Deshmukh is not hungry for publicity. As the head of the PMO, he keeps a low-profile. Unlike his predecessors—L K Jha and Dr P C Alexander—he

does not have a towering personality nor does he possess strong likes and dislikes. He is not bossy. He is neither loud. And he is not imposing either. But he is a capable administrator with a talent for integrating widely divergent points of view into a general overview. And this was the asset that brought him to the PMO in a crucial election year.

Deshmukh was born into a family of nationalists in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, on 26 March, 1929. He did well in his intermediate examination in the science stream and wanted to study medicine in

He joined the Maharashtra cadre and was posted in Tharad, a remote part of the famine-prone Banaskantha district, now in Gujarat. Tharad did not have electricity. Deshmukh's friends pitied him. But he wasn't bothered at all. Instead, he believed that an officer's baptism in administration is best done in the harshest of conditions. It was a stint he was never to forget. When he was posted there, Tharad, then part of a princely state, was in the process of changing from feudal rule to democracy. Administrators were busy making

revenue settlements. There was apprehension all round. Deshmukh participated in the process.

The principal secretary is a man who has made it to the top of the bureaucratic ladder painstakingly. He showed his mettle in whatever post he was assigned. And he feels strongly about a bureaucrat's work ethic. "A civil servant should have his own code of conduct," he once said. "Unless he observes it and does his job well, he has no business to grumble that somebody is interfering in his work." He added, "Your ambition should be to be remembered as a good officer."

In end-1989, Deshmukh had suffered a personal tragedy. He lost his only child, a daughter,

after she had caught fever. It was a cruel blow, because they were a small and happy family. He often spent his evenings with his wife and daughter, chatting. He is also an avid reader, and enjoys watching films and plays. His wife doesn't like him bringing his work home. And that, in a way, makes him more efficient. He was known to have said, when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, "I am fortunate to have such a good, understanding boss." One is sure that the same opinion holds good for V P Singh as well. •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**

**Says Deshmukh:**  
**"A civil servant should have his own code of conduct. And his ambition should be to be remembered as a good officer"**



Bombay. But his father, Gangadhar, had other plans for him. He wanted his son to join the administrative service to help Jawaharlal Nehru transform India into a modern state. The young Deshmukh was a bit disappointed. But he, too, was impressed by the freedom struggle movement and the leaders it had thrown up. He went on to complete his B Sc (Hons) from Bombay University and masters in Economics at Williams College in the U.S. Incidentally, he even refused an offer of a scholarship to do his doctorate at Yale before emerging successful in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) examination in 1951.



# Disinformation campaign

*How the press is building up a war hysteria*



Disinformation about matters military and strategic is the name of the game. Like spying, described as a "silent war" by one of its consummate practitioners, the late Kim Philby, the campaign to sow confusion, demoralisation, discord and panic goes on all the time. Understandably, it gets intensified in times of tension. No wonder then that, with the escalating war of words between India and Pakistan, there has been a plethora of evidently inspired and motivated stories with disinformation as their primary aim.

A case in point is the item, displayed across all eight columns of a Sunday paper, announcing to the world, that this country was about to acquire from the Soviet Union a second nuclear-powered submarine. From all accounts, it seems to be a case of an enterprising reporter in search of a scoop having been used by interested parties and sources to spread a villainous canard at a very crucial time.

Pakistan has been screaming its head off against INS Chakra, the only nuclear-propelled submarine the Indian Navy has on lease from the Soviet Union, since the days when Indo-Pak relations were reasonably good. At a time when it has opened up all its propaganda guns on India on all conceivable subjects, the report that Chakra might soon have a companion to be called Chitra, would have been a godsend to Islamabad. What a justification it would have been to inveigh against India, especially in the United States which, too, has been highly critical of Indian acquisition of Chakra for a five-year period for training. Was it a pure coincidence that the report appeared on the day President Bush's

special envoy, Robert Gates, arrived in New Delhi?

Against this background it was only to be expected that the Indian Navy would take the earliest opportunity to deny and discredit the report that was wholly unfounded in any case. This it did in the person of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral J.G. Nadkarni. Interestingly, the navy chief's categorical contradiction was carried by almost all newspapers with the conspicuous exception of the one that had given the original fiction such a big play in the first place.

Anyone in touch with maritime developments in this country would have known that the idea of acquiring a second nuclear-powered submarine was dropped quite some time ago,

stopped to ponder that the *Defence Journal* is the same magazine which had tried to foster the military nonsense that India had garrisoned the Siachen glacier in order to attack the Karakoram highway from this base in time of need.

However, why blame the general run of the Indian intelligentsia for its gullibility when the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was also defence minister for a time, can make the outlandish statement that a war with Pakistan would cost the country, Rs 6,000 crores a day? It is possible that this hilarious hyperbole is the result of his irritation with the Janata Dal government in general and V.P. Singh in particular. Lieutenant-General Eric Vaz's estimate of the

daily cost to India of a war with Pakistan is Rs 600 crores and some others consider even this a gross overestimate.

The sexiest story appertaining to the fears of the fourth India-Pakistan war is, of course, the one in London's *The Sunday Times*. Attributed to US intelligence sources in Washington, it conjures up lurid visions of Pakistan having made its nuclear weaponry operational, just in case. Mercifully, this has not made anyone lose sleep.

Some Indian experts were arguing the other day that if the Pakistanis were in fact carting nuclear weapons from Kahuta, they would not have made their security so conspicuous. They had to be told that ostentatiousness is an essential feature of operations intended largely for psychological purposes. Nearly 30 years ago, John Kenneth Galbraith, then US ambassador to India, had reported to President Kennedy, that the Pakistanis had unloaded the first squadron of US-gifted F-104 aircraft "with secrecy that would attend mass sodomy at BMT at rush hour". ●



Rajiv Gandhi: misguiding the masses?

SHOOTER

when Rajiv Gandhi was still in power, and has not been revived since. On the contrary, some Smart Ales had tried even to return Chakra to Russia. Mercifully, this folly was nipped in the bud in good time.

In spite of these facts being well known, the temptation to swallow as the gospel of truth, whatever western defence publications choose to peddle, dies hard in India. Because London's *Defence Journal* hinted that New Delhi was asking Moscow for a second nuclear-powered sub, which seems to have been taken as an established fact. No one seems to have



# Shuffling the pack

*V.P. Singh inducts a new team of sleuths*

**T**he new order has only brought back old faces. Despite V.P. Singh's much-publicised 'Operation Clean-up', the National Front government just couldn't afford to do without many of the Rajiv regime's sleuths. This is particularly true of the country's premier intelligence agencies—the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in particular. Recent events have shown that far from discarding the men whom V.P. Singh had criticised not so long ago, the new regime has fallen back on them to bail it out of tricky situations and keep a tab on the activities of its rivals.

Expectedly, after assuming office in November last year, V.P. Singh made a number of changes in the top rungs of the IB, RAW and other central agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Special Protection Group (SPG). The shake-up invited a fair amount of criticism. V.P. Singh's detractors pointed out that the Prime Minister had given too many plum posts to officers from his home state, Uttar Pradesh. But what surprised even the Raja's supporters was the fact that many of Rajiv Gandhi's advisers on security and intelligence ended up being rewarded.

Take M.K. Narayanan, for instance. The former IB chief is undoubtedly one of the first intelligence officers in the country but he acquired the dubious distinction of being Rajiv Gandhi's hatchet man. During his tenure, Narayanan had converted the IB into

an intelligence-gathering wing of the Congress party and his sole job was to nail the former PM's political rivals. Little wonder then that Narayanan was removed as soon as V.P. Singh took charge. He was replaced by R.P. Joshi, an officer from the Uttar Pradesh cadre. Observers point out that the all-powerful Cabinet secretary of the new regime, Vinod Pande, played an important role in swinging the appointment in favour of Joshi, who, incidentally, is his brother-in-law.

Many had expected that Narayanan would be shunted out in some obscure post after he lost the top job in the IB. But V.P. Singh had other ideas: he

appointed Narayanan as chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) of the Cabinet secretariat. True, the JIC has lost much of its clout but it still remains the nodal agency of the IB, the RAW and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI). Moreover, if and when the National Security Council (NSC) is formed, the JIC is likely to play a key role in the formulation of the country's security policy.

The idea of the NSC, based on the American pattern, was first mooted by the Janata Dal government a few months back. The proposal is now awaiting Cabinet clearance. According to the proposal, the JIC will operate as the secretariat of the NSC

and this will certainly make its chief, M.K. Narayanan, an important figure. A senior official of the IB said: "We are hoping that the NSC will not become a political organisation like the Political Affairs Committee or the National Integration Council."

According to sources close to the Prime Minister, M.K. Narayanan was advising V.P. Singh much before the NSC proposal was even mooted. Ever since the Punjab and Kashmir problems took a turn for the worse, the PM has been regularly seeking the views of the former IB boss on these two important issues. Not that the present chief has been sidelined: Joshi too briefs V.P. Singh daily but he is yet to win the Prime Minister's confidence. Also, in the recent past, the IB badly slipped up on at least two occasions. When deputy prime minister Devi Lal resigned a couple of months back fol-

RAJENDRA SHEKHAR, CBI director



The CBI continues to be a tool in the hands of politicians



lowing the furore over Meham, the IB had no clue of it; in fact, the agency came to know of it from the home ministry. And, the bureau was also completely in the dark about Chandra Shekhar using a de-bugging device.

**B**ut despite all the noises made about how Rajiv Gandhi misused the IB, the role of this premier intelligence agency has not changed drastically even after the change of government at the Centre. One of the IB's main task is still to shadow rivals of ruling politicians. Very little has changed within the RAW too. While in the Opposition, Janata Dal leaders had alleged that this agency was involved in fomenting trouble in the non-Congress(I)-ruled states like Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and even in Sri Lanka at the behest of the ruling party. Today, the Tamil Nadu chief minister, M. Karunanidhi, has repeated the charges even though his party, the DMK, is part of the ruling coalition at the Centre.

But V.P. Singh's inability to make drastic changes or alter the style of functioning of the RAW—for that matter any other intelligence agency—overnight is understandable. For one, the Prime Minister was keen not to appear as a vindictive politician, bent upon punishing everyone associated with the former regime. Thus, even though he removed Narayanan, Singh

**M.K. NARAYANAN, Chairman JIC**



did not sack the RAW chief A.K. Verma. Instead, he waited for Verma to retire. And the man who has been selected to succeed Verma is Gauri Shankar Bajpai, the former chief of the JIC. So, basically it is shuffling around the old hands and new faces are hard to come by.

There are indeed very few options left before V.P. Singh since experienced people to man important bodies like the intelligence agencies are in short supply. Thus the Prime Minister had little choice but to bring back those who were spending a relaxed retired life. Girish (Gary) Saxena, the former RAW chief, was brought in first as the PM's security adviser and when things were going out of control in Kashmir, he was promptly despatched to the troubled territory as Governor Punjab and Delhi too have been left to the charge of two veterans—Nirmal Mukarji and Arjan Singh.

**H**owever, the one organisation where the Prime Minister was expected to introduce dramatic, if not revolutionary, changes was the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The Bureau under its infamous chief, Mohan Katre, was thoroughly politicised under the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi. But although the CBI now has an able chief, Rajendra Shekhar, who

**O**nce the National Security Council proposal is cleared by the Cabinet, the former IB chief will be an important figure

also happens to be an officer of the UP cadre and is a batch-mate of Vinod Pande—the agency continues to be used as a tool in the hands of the ruling party. Observers point out that the CBI has been entrusted with several investigations which have distinct political overtones—Bofors, the HDW submarine deal and the Airbus A320 contract, to name a few. To top it all, the CBI has also been asked to enquire into the allegations about the Janata Dal leader Chandra Shekhar's telephone-tapping by the present regime.

Burdened with all these as well as other cases, the CBI is clearly under tremendous pressure. The government lately has decided to set up a special cell within the agency to lessen the work load. Called the Special Investigation Group (SIG), the cell is headed by N.K. Singh, an officer who was considerably harassed by the Congress government, apparently because he was a member of the Shah Commission which enquired into the famous Kissa Kursi Ka case. The Prime Minister is believed to have rehabilitated Singh at the instance of Ram Jethmalani and Rabi Ray, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

And it is the SIG which has been assigned the task to investigate most of the controversial deals of the previous regime—a job that is bound to have political repercussions. As a senior CBI official said, "Our compulsions have not changed. The agency is answerable to politicians and if the government wants us to investigate sensitive cases) no one can say no."

That unfortunately is the dilemma of all the chiefs of the country's intelligence agencies. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**

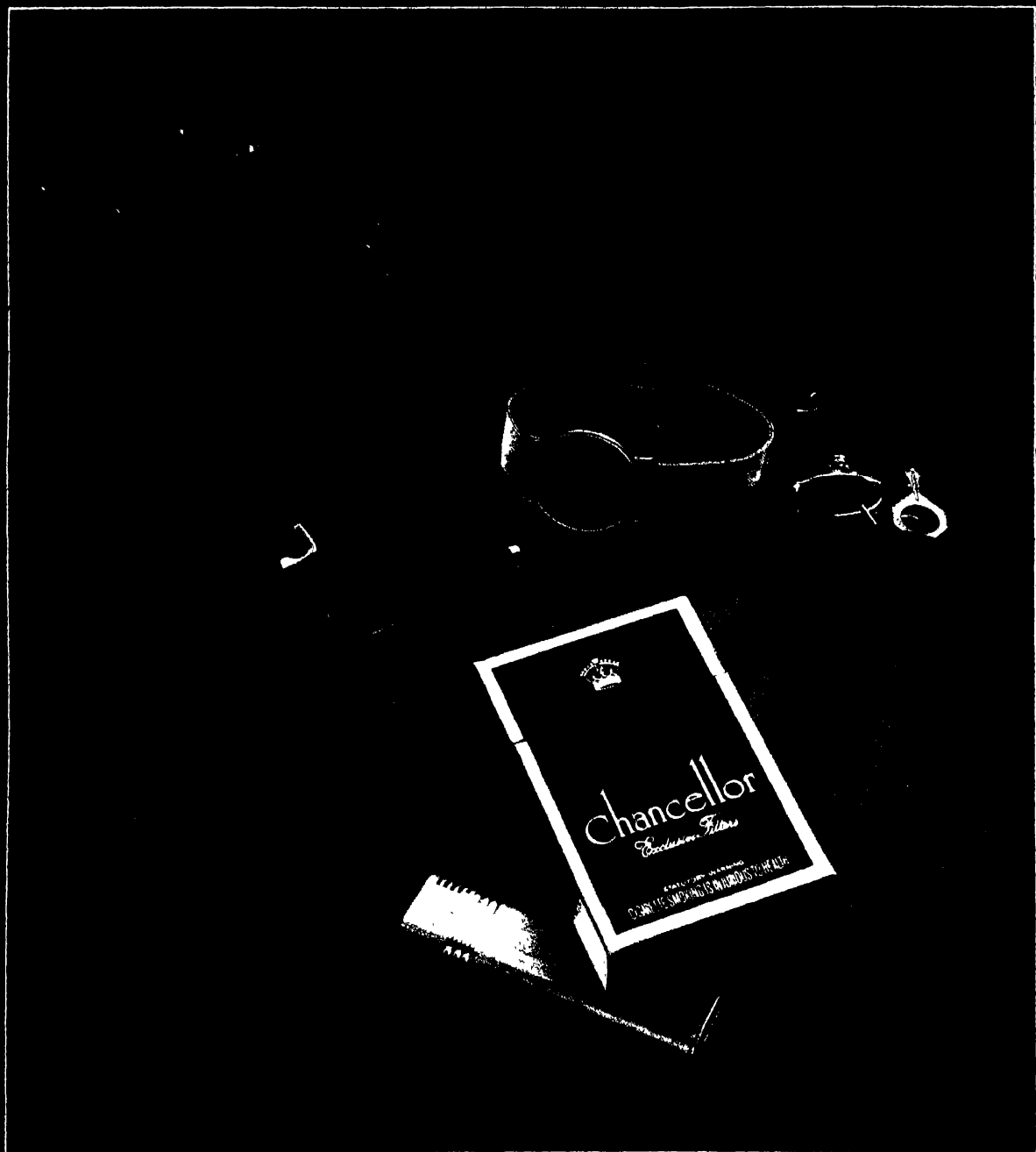
**VINOD PANDE, Cabinet secretary**



**The kingmaker of the bureaucracy**



SOME POSSESSIONS DEFINE A CHARACTER.  
Some distinguish it.



 Chancellor<sup>11</sup>  
*Exclusive Filter*

A cigarette so distinguished,  
It's by appointment to your majesty.



# A political cipher

*Rajiv Gandhi fails to make a mark as an Opposition leader*

# A

diversity often brings out the best in a leader. Even if Rajiv Gandhi failed as a Prime Minister, many had expected him to shine as an Opposition leader.

Nothing of this sort has yet happened and Congressmen are increasingly voicing their resentment against Rajiv Gandhi's leadership. The other day, the veteran Uma Shankar Dixit called the Congress president "a political

Gandhi failed to mobilise public opinion against the present regime. Then came the brutal murder of the vice-chancellor of Kashmir University, Mushir-ul Haq, and the general manager of HMT, H.L. Khera, by terrorists in Srinagar. The entire nation was shocked and even the Kashmiris were seething with anger. It was a difficult moment for V.P. Singh. But the Congress did precious little to exploit the situation

However, the most important aspect where Rajiv Gandhi has failed

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) showed signs of losing interest in the Ram Janmabhoomi affair and to keep the explosive issue alive, Rajiv Gandhi and his party propped up the Shankaracharya

But this is surely a dangerous game that Rajiv Gandhi is playing. In 1977-78, the trio of Sanjay Gandhi, Giani Zail Singh and R.K. Dhawan did the same thing in Punjab with disastrous consequences. They encouraged Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who later became the fountainhead of terrorism in the state. Interestingly, Rajiv Gandhi continued to call Bhindranwale a saint even when terrorism was at its height in Punjab

The Shankaracharya's plans may have been scuttled but can this be construed as a victory for secular forces? The VHP will certainly go ahead with the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple and if that happens, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will be the real gainer. The Congress will find itself in the same hopeless position as it did during the last parliamentary polls forsaken by both the Hindus and the Muslims.

Defeat, it seems, has not taught Rajiv Gandhi any lesson. His style of functioning remains the same and he continues to be guided by manipulators and fixers. Take the instance of R.K. Dhawan. It was largely due to Dhawan that Rajiv didn't even try and embarrass Devi Lal over the Meham issue. Had he done so, the inner contradictions within the Janata Dal would surely have been exposed. It was again these advisers who sold Rajiv Gandhi the idea that the Congress could win back the support of the Hindus if the party encouraged the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth to go ahead with his *shilanyas* programme. The move obviously backfired and the Congress is now being charged with fanning the flames of communalism.

The tragedy is that an alternative to the Congress seems nowhere in sight. From the look of things, the country too cannot afford to ignore the Congress. But the nation can surely do without Rajiv Gandhi. ●



**Rajiv Gandhi in Meham: failed to exploit the situation**

zero". For over five months now, Rajiv Gandhi is out in the cold but he has done nothing worthwhile to rejuvenate the disillusioned party workers he leads.

Instead of cashing in on the Janata Dal's failures, Rajiv Gandhi is wasting his energy hitting out at the press and holding the media responsible for his plight. But the Congress president should realise that it was the press which gave him endless opportunities to embarrass the present regime. But the former PM just frittered away the chances.

First it was Meham. The media highlighted the mindless violence and the rigging, holding the Haryana government, and Om Prakash Chautala in particular, responsible for the mayhem. But at a time when Prime Minister V.P. Singh and his colleagues were clearly on the defensive, Rajiv

is to project himself as a secular leader. He just cannot resist the temptation of playing the Hindu card. That's why he allowed the impression to spread that the Congress was behind the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth, Swami Swaroopanand's attempts to lay the foundation stone of a controversial temple at Ayodhya. The

**Rajiv Gandhi has failed to project himself as a secular leader. He just cannot resist the temptation of playing the Hindu card**



# Life begins at forty!

*With unprecedented success behind it, things can only get better for Chitralekha*



Their cable code says it all "WAI BHAI WAH" And the phrase was echoed by the 3,000-odd people who thronged their 40th anniversary celebration party at one of Bombay's suburban five-star hotels last weekend. Cheering from the sidelines were the 3.25,000 buyers of what has now become India's number one Gujarati weekly—*Chitralekha*. In addition to being Bombay's largest-selling magazine (1,25,000 copies) in any language, including English, with four other editions—International Surat, Ahmedabad/Baroda, Saurashtra/Kutch—flying off the racks.

But they don't make too much of this success story at the Andheri Industrial Estate office of *Chitralekha* in Bombay. Housing *Chitralekha* Marathi, *Jee Gujarati*, *Jee Marathi*, *G English* (in addition to the parent magazine) and ultra-modern post-production facilities, the building is divided into what any self-respecting Gujarati would immediately recognise as *galas*.

In the main *gala*, on the mezzanine level, sit the higher-ups of the *Chitralekha* hierarchy: the soft-spoken, gentle Madhuriben Kotak, wife of the late Vaju Kotak who founded *Chitralekha*; the intuitive editor Harkishen Mehta, Madhuriben's son Maulik Kotak, the man responsible for the magazine's technological leap, her son-in-law Bharat Kapadia, who put *Chitralekha* on every media-planner's list; and Haresh Daftary, possibly the group's most important employee.

Asks Bharat Kapadia, "Do you know the difference between Manmohan Desai, the

eminent film director, and the Manmohan Desai of Gujarati journalism, Harkishenbhai?" The director has had a few flops." Maulik Kotak looks up from the glossy brochure of a particularly advanced DTP (Desk-Top Publishing) he's thinking of buying, grins, and goes right back to studying the literature. He and Bharat have, says the latter, "no time for minor vices like smoking, drinking and Pan Parag." Instead their pet obsession is, in the words of the jingle recorded on all office phones, *Chitralekha-Chitralekha-Chitralekha*.

It was Kapadia, for instance, who thought of giving every single *Chitralekha* reader a free audio cassette with the 40th anniversary issue. The 60-minute tape reveals the inside story of the group: the grind behind the glory, the sweat behind the success.

"It is a very wide canvas that we are writing for," explains editor Harkishenbhai. "Therefore we have to ensure that our writing style and our presentation of facts is palatable to all." Every word which goes into the magazine is first scrutinised by him. Often enough there is a certain amount of rewriting to "polish it up to the *Chitralekha* style." The 63-year-old Harkishen Mehta has already

trained a few staff members to take over as editor at some point, and is now looking for "someone to rewrite the stories the way they should be done, so that continuity is always maintained".

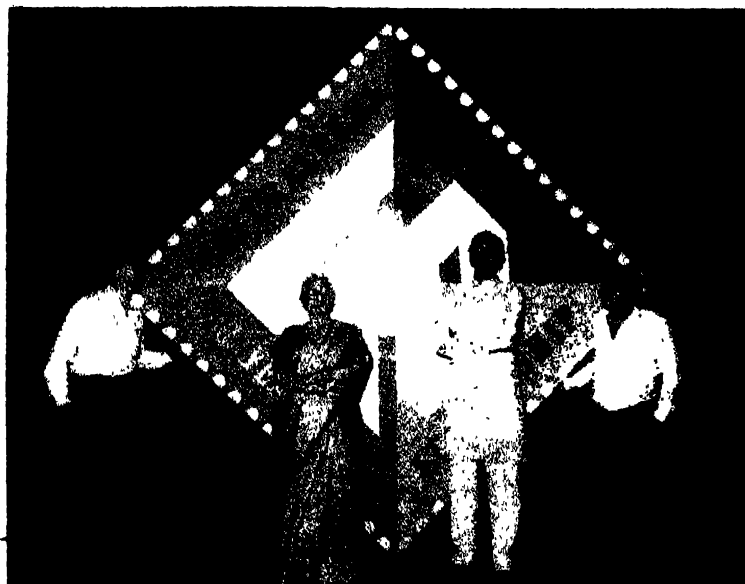
Serialised novels—along with the humour column, the investigative stories and the updating of topical events—have become one of the four pillars of *Chitralekha*. So much so that there have been calls from all over the world requesting that their end be revealed in advance. "Once," recounts Harkishenbhai, "I received a call from Bombay Hospital. The son of a blood cancer patient was on the line. His father, the doctors had said, would die any time. The son had called me because his father wanted to know how our serialised novel, running at that time, would end. I said I couldn't say because I didn't know, the chapters were being formed on a weekly basis. But I went across and met the patient, and he asked that the story end happily. I only asked him if life ever ended happily and completely."

Vaju Kotak's life certainly ended rather abruptly, though it was eventful enough. He was editing *Chitrapat*, a film weekly, when asked

to apologise in print for a defamatory film review. Pointing out that the review had been inserted by the publishers in his absence, and therefore without his approval, Vaju Kotak quit.

Around this time he met Harkishen Mehta, then a manager in a printing press. They teamed up, purchased a printing press with loans from friends and well-wishers and *Chitralekha* was launched. Staff strength was then 20; today it stands at 110, including the boys in the press. Then came *Jee*, the

(From left) Bharat Kapadia, Madhuriben Kotak, Harkishen Mehta and Maulik Kotak: the *Chitralekha* think-tank





Gujarati film magazine (current ABC circulation 1,02,627), then *Jee* in Marathi (ABC. 66,400) followed by *G* in English (they will be applying for 45,000 ABC this term) and *Chit-ralekha* in Marathi (circulation: 75,000).

But soon after the launch of what has now become the group's flagship, Vaju Kotak died of a heart attack, leaving behind a 28-year-old wife, three children and a magazine poised on the springboard of success. The initial problems of transition over, the group did well. Today, Harkishenbhai runs *Chitralekha*, Madhuriben edits *Jee* (Gujarati and Marathi) with her son Bipin assisting her. Maulik has ensured that *Chitralekha* was one of the first few publications to go offset in India, and son-in-law Bharat Kapadia (married to daughter Ronak who runs her own textile block-printing establishment from another *gala*), with his marketing acumen, made every ad agency sit up and take note of *Chitralekha*.

"I remember very clearly," he says, "the first time I went to Calcutta to speak to the agencies there. I had only just joined *Chitralekha* as a partner in 1979."

Kapadia reached Calcutta, and made his way to the office of a major agency, presentation kit securely in hand. There was a power breakdown. Bharat climbed all 13 floors, only to be told by an account executive, "We are planning a shoe campaign at the moment. But our research shows that Gujaratis don't wear shoes. So, sorry, there's nothing for you."

"I was dumbstruck," narrates Kapadia. "I looked down at my own feet, sure, I had my shoes on, I was Gujarati, this man knew it. But then this was a mental block I was dealing with, it had to be dispelled. So I told him 'There are 19 different suiting accounts with *Chitralekha*. Does this mean that Gujaratis wear their suits without their shoes?' "*Chitralekha* got the account."

If much trial, little error and a lot of experience has been Kapadia's teacher, Maulik Kotak too has had no formal education in his line of interest. "As a child I was very interested in photography," he says. "Both my father and mother shot pictures, so I picked it up from them. As I grew I got more involved in production. To me photo-offset was very similar to photography."

Since then it's been a constant search for configurations which would

## "The magazine became my vision"

*Madhuriben Kotak on life after her husband's premature death*

*She is, without a doubt, the grande dame of Gujarati journalism. But she blushes if you say that to her. "No, no," Madhuriben Kotak, murmurs "all credit must go to (Vaju) Kotak, and now to all those who have made Chitralekha what it is."*

*Excerpts from her conversation with SUNDAY.*

**SUNDAY:** You have studied only till standard seven in the Gujarati medium. Wasn't it difficult to run several magazines in Bombay without knowing a word of Hindi or English?

**Madhuriben Kotak:** When Kotak died we had been married ten-and-a-half years. My children were eight, seven and four respectively. He died suddenly in the middle of what everyone referred to as his one-man, one-pen show—*Chit-ralekha*. And I...I went to pieces.

I was all of 28 years of age then. I began losing weight, I incarcerated myself at home. But then Kotak's friends came forward. They insisted that I keep the show on the road. When I thought about it with all my senses around me, I realised they were right.

So, there was never time to worry about my handicaps, which experience later helped me overcome.

work to the magazine's maximum advantage. Like the time, two years back, when he was at a major computer fair in San Francisco. He tinkered around with the machines (in the process teaching the other participants a thing or two) and came up with what he thought was the right configuration. He took it along to editor of *Macworld*, the official Mackintosh computers magazine, who said, "Sure this would work, it would work beautifully. Except that we haven't got this in our own office because we didn't think of it."

If a lot of head goes into the marketing and presentation, "a lot of heart goes into editorial", says editor

**Q: What was Vaju Kotak like?**

**A:** He would get up at 5 am everyday, tea cup in hand he would sit down to write. Often he would call me and ask me to sit by his side. I knew that he was initiating me into the world of words.



**Madhuriben Kotak: keeping her husband's dream alive**

Now, at 59, when I look back I sometimes think, perhaps he knew all along that I would have to fend for myself, that's why he was preparing me.

**Q: And now, 40 years of *Chit-ralekha* later, what are your plans?**

**A:** Tomorrow is another day. Perhaps good, perhaps bad. Be it as it may, I'll take it in my stride. That's what life is about, isn't it? ●

Harkishen Mehta "In fact that's our motto: the dailies are headlines, *Chit-ralekha* is the heartline. Where the dailies stop, our job begins."

And have readers missed Kanti and Sheela Bhatt, the *Chitralekha* stars, who left to start the competing *Abhiyaan*? Harkishenbhai shrugs: "I think there should be more Gujarati magazines. And if they don't look like *Chitralekha*, they can have a lakh in circulation of their own without too much difficulty."

Analytical aside over, the Manmohan Desai of Gujarati journalism goes right back to producing the next week's best-seller. ●

*Pinkie Virani/Bombay*



# A burning issue

*The biogas plant project hasn't really got the home fires going*

**F**or Maneka Gandhi, smelling was believing. "Stop it, I can't stand the stench," the minister gasped as she ventured into the Rashtriya Chemical Plant at Chembur, Bombay. Nervous officials tried desperately to amend matters as the other Mrs Gandhi displayed shades of her mother-in-law's famed temper. The tantrums worked. The very next day, 11 May, the Maharashtra chief minister announced that his government had decided to promote horticulture and afforestation, the programme involving an expenditure of Rs 50 crores during 1990-91 alone. Sharad Pawar declared that one lakh hectares of land would be brought under the project.

But Maneka's fiery speeches on the need for re-greening our planet earth and the popularisation of safe and economic alternative sources of energy persisted. If the environment minister had, however, conducted a whistle-stop tour of Maharashtra's villages, she would have been appalled at the way the state's biogas programme has worked out. First used in India in 1960 and touted as a viable alternate source of energy, biogas digesters are now nothing more than defunct testimonials to a fine idea gone wrong.

A methane-rich fuel, biogas is produced by the anaerobic digestion of organic matter (cattle dung, in this instance), and stored in gas holders. It can then be used through specially-designed burners. But the number of non-functional plants on the Bombay-Goa highway alone proves that the biogas programme has been a total failure.

Not just in Maharashtra but in the rest of the country as well. Under the National Project for Biogas Development (NPBD) launched in 1981-82, around 3,44,000 biogas plants were to be established country-wide during

the last four years of the Sixth Five-Year Plan. The pace was accelerated during the Seventh Plan, and 5,64,000 plants were constructed in the first three years against the targeted 4,20,000. Government figures have it that 1,73,000 plants were set up in 1987.

As the government got more ambitious, the various states were assigned bigger targets. This had the inevitable fall-out: officials concentrated on fulfilling their targets without following up in the prescribed manner. Not surprisingly then, the biogas project failed even before it could take off.

In 1989 it was discovered that the Bhagyalakshmi type of biogas plants

**P**art of the problem arises from the existence of the government subsidy worth Rs 3,360 granted to villagers for the installation of a three cubic meter biogas plant. This, combined with the existence of over-zealous officials, anxious to fulfil their targets, ensures that the plants are set up at random. Government rules are flouted with impunity, with the regulation that each applicant must own at least four head of cattle being observed only in the breach.

Once a plant has been set up, a truck-load of fresh *gobar* (cattle dung) is required to fulfil its fuel needs. Generally, villagers cannot afford this expense. Hence, most plants remain

non-functional. Says Mahmood Mazhar Kazi, who owns a timber business in the Goregaon area of Raigad district: "Yes, I admit that it is difficult for a poor man to get a truck load of fresh *gobar* initially, but something should be done about this problem."

If nothing is done about it, and soon, the few trees (including some valuable species, such as teak) which remain intact will be cut down by the villagers as well.

L. Bagul, agricultural consultant of the Panchayat Samiti Samaj of Mangao district believes differently. He says:

"Each gas plant that we have set up saves five full-grown trees a year. In 1989-90, we installed around 140 biogas plants. Things are going very smoothly and we have effectively reduced the cutting of trees."

But the existence of several illegal timber depots proves that Bagul doesn't know what he is talking about. Most villagers share R. Shashikant's attitude: "There are so many trees here. What's wrong if I cut a few. Trees will continue to grow as they have been doing for thousands of years now." •

*Godfrey Pereira/Raigad and Mangao*



**An illegal timber depot: biogas plants have made no difference**

in Karnataka had failed conspicuously. An extensive survey conducted by the rural development and the Panchayati Raj department held cement shortage, and the indifference and inefficiency of the concerned government officials, responsible in this regard.

In Bihar, the state government simply held back the funds (Rs 18.72 lakhs) allocated by the centre for this project. The comptroller and auditor general's (CAG) report of 1988 stated that the Bihar government had spent Rs 1.59 lakhs after 1982, but this expenditure proved "unfruitful".



# Caught tapping

*Now, will Hegde resign on moral grounds?*

**A**fter Om Prakash Chautala, the former chief minister of Haryana, Jagmohan, the ex-Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, and Nirmal Mukarjee, who gave up the gubernatorial office he held in troubled Punjab recently, it seems the turn has come for Ramakrishna Hegde, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, to resign on moral grounds. A parliamentary report, tabled in the Rajya Sabha on 1 June, has revealed that Hegde had lied when he claimed

that he knew nothing about the tapping of telephone lines of Opposition leaders in Karnataka. The scandal had come to light in 1988 and Hegde quit as the chief minister of the state, after owning moral responsibility for the unseemly affair.

But now it seems that Hegde might have to resign for the second time—as the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission—if he really cares for the

values he stands for. Though Hegde was not available for comment on the findings of the probe (he was away in China when the report was tabled), SUNDAY spoke to him on the eve of his departure for Beijing and Hegde aired his moralistic views on the Meham incident. "We (politicians) are wedded to certain values," the former chief minister of Karnataka declared. He added that far from restraining the Planning Commission member, L. C. Jain, from resigning over the Meham incident, he himself would have liked to relinquish his Planning Commission post in protest. "I belong to that class of politicians," he boasted.

Explaining his stand on the phone bugging controversy, Hegde said: "Why did I resign over the silly phone tapping issue? You know I did not order it. I was not even aware, but the intelligence was going on doing it for the last many years. It was done in accordance with the previous chief minister's orders. But it was against

my conscience and I took moral responsibility for the incident."

But the findings of the parliamentary probe contradicts Hegde's moralistic protestations. After Hegde resigned in August 1988, the matter was referred to the chairman of the Committee of Subordinate Legislation of the Rajya Sabha. The report of the committee chairman Chowdhary Ram Sewak, was tabled on 1 June, the last day of this parliamentary session. If anything, the report has exploded

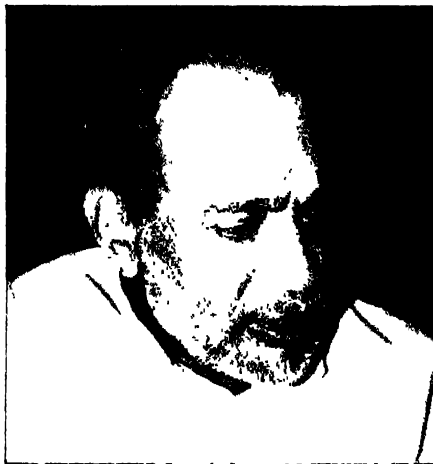
the committee felt, the provisions of the section were hardly specific and left the scope for its blatant misuse.

As was to be expected, the contents of the report created a minor furore in the Rajya Sabha, with some Opposition members demanding Hegde's resignation from the Planning Commission. Among them were V.N. Gadgil of the Congress(I) and Subramaniam Swamy of the Janata Party, a long-time political foe of Hegde's. Swamy was on his feet demanding "in view

of this conclusive evidence before Parliament, if Mr Hegde has an iota of self-respect, he should quit public life as he had vowed to do".

Interestingly, Hegde has retained his Assembly seat in Karnataka, though he was appointed the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission. He obviously did this in order to keep a foothold in the state's politics, though his own explanation is somewhat

**According to the enquiry report, the list of phones to be tapped was prepared in consultation with Hegde**



Hegde's assertion that "he did not order" the tapping.

As part of its enquiry, the committee took a statement on oath from the chief secretary of Karnataka, M. Sankaranarayanan. He was asked at whose behest the telephones of 51 persons, including those of Janata Party leader Deve Gowda, and M. S. Gurupadaswamy, were tapped? Sankaranarayanan's reply was categorical. "The list of phone numbers, including deletions and additions in it, were prepared in consultation with prior permission of the chief minister. No other functionary was kept advised of the list."

Regarding the provisions of Section 5 of the Indian Telegraph Act, under which the tapping was done, the committee expressed its unhappiness over the failure of the ministry of communication and the state governments to frame adequate safeguards to prevent the misuse of the law. At present,

different. "I had retained my seat only because my constituents insisted that I do. But I do not have time for active politics and would not like to involve myself in party politics also. That is why I hardly campaigned for my colleagues in the Assembly elections," Hegde told SUNDAY.

But maybe, having experienced the rough and tumble of politics for decades, Hegde was genuinely apprehensive about the findings of the committee. Uptil now, he has had an unsteady run as the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission with a serious move afoot to make him the president of the Janata Dal. In his own words, Hegde refused the offer "because he did not want to leave a job half-done" in Yojana Bhavan. But once he returns from China, he will again face an embarrassing situation. After all, he had indeed ordered the tapplings, his moral postures notwithstanding. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



# STARTING OVER

*Rajiv Gandhi launches his comeback. But will India give him a second chance?*

**T**he hair is thinner. That once-boyish face has furrows. The voice is deeper, less sing-song and more assured. But Rajiv Gandhi is back. And he's not going to let anybody ignore him.

After a few months of introspection, the former Prime Minister has embarked on what he hopes will be his comeback. His manner shows a new confidence, the old argumentative arrogance that masked a shy insecurity is firmly in check, and while the coterie has not been disbanded, it has been expanded so much that its influence has been dispersed.

Over the last month, Rajiv has emerged from his shell and hit the road. Some instances:

- When the first Meham election was countermanded, Rajiv was advised by such leaders as Rajasthan's Hardeo Joshi to visit the constituency. He turned down the advice because R. K. Dhawan told him that it was more important to appease Devi Lal. But when the second poll was also countermanded, Rajiv ignored Dhawan and recognised that Meham could be to him what Belchi had been to his mother—the start of a comeback.

Mrs Gandhi went to Belchi on an elephant, Rajiv took Mani Shankar Aiyar and a convoy of 300 cars, but the effect was much the same. In the very heart of Jat country, he attracted crowds of thousands, clambered on to the roof of a car and addressed the multitudes. It was the kind of response that only a truly national leader could attract.

- The Meham expedition had been preceded by a successful fast. The cynics had joked that he was only working up an appetite for an Escalope Milanese at dinner, but by squatting in 42°C heat for 12 hours, Rajiv served notice that if his had been the air-conditioned prime ministership, his spell as leader of the Opposition would be very different.

- An all-party convention against communalism in New Delhi received a boost when the left parties agreed to attend. Despite warnings from the National Front that participation in a Congress(I)-sponsored affair would confuse the country, the left turned up. And when the convention's ritual denunciations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) drew an angry riposte from L. K. Advani, Rajiv was delighted. He had succeeded in conveying to the minorities (who deserted the Congress in droves last year) that he was on their side.

It helped also that he was the star of the convention, was continually mobbed by the faithful and courted by the curious. Memories of his government's ambiguous Ram Janmabhoomi policy had obviously receded.

- Emboldened by these successes, Rajiv finally made a triumphant return to the floor of the Lok Sabha. During the first session of Parliament, his had been a constant, hectoring presence. But when his interventions were perceived as negative and even childish, Rajiv retreated to his office in the Parliament House complex.

For most of the recently concluded session, he rarely ventured to the floor



of the House. The reticence faded after the success of his Meham escapade. Then, he was at his best, pressing for Om Prakash Chautala's resignation as chief minister of Haryana and Jagmohan's ouster as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. When he got both, he even found the confidence to demonstrate a bizarre aggression on the Bofors issue and demand that the government table the report of the Swedish National Audit Bureau.

So strong was the Congress(I) attack and so dispirited the response from the Treasury benches that even Arun Shourie—no friend of Rajiv's—was moved to comment in the *Indian Express* that unless the government improved its parliamentary performance, "it will not last through the monsoon session."

For gleeful Congress(I) members, it was almost as though happy days were here again. With the government on the defensive, they chortled, it was only a matter of time before Rajiv



**1990**

Rajiv Gandhi's reticence faded after the success of his Meham visit. His manner now shows a new confidence

became Prime Minister again.

The euphoria was understandable, but it was also hopelessly naive. Despite the triumphs of the last few weeks, Rajiv Gandhi was far from being the Prime Minister-in-waiting that the party imagined he was. Most of the country had deep reservations about his leadership and though the faithful exulted, Race Course Road still seemed a long way away.

**O**f course, it shouldn't have been like that. Recent Indian political history has demonstrated that Oppositions do not win elections; governments

lose them. In 1977, the country threw out the Congress(I) not because it believed that Morarji Desai and the Janata Party would provide stable governance, but because it recognised that Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime had to go. By 1980, the Con-



gress was back not so much because it had mended its ways, but because India had tired of Janata's squabbles. And in 1989, the results of the general election demonstrated that all the electorate was agreed upon was that the Congress needed to be turned out, the poll yielded no clear winner.

A mere six months later that lesson in his-

torical inevitability should serve as a morale-booster for Rajiv Gandhi. After all, the Congress(I) is the largest party in Parliament—with 50 seats more than the ruling Janata Dal—and is ideally placed to benefit from any disillusionment with the government.

And who can deny that the disappointment is mounting? The National Front regime has failed to control prices, watched in bewilderment as Kashmir veers towards secession, driven the country to the brink of war and failed even to deliver on such simple promises as the undertaking to make Doordarshan truly free.

Moreover, its members have engaged in squabble after squabble. First, Chandra Shekhar claimed that Devi Lal had lied to him about the leadership. Then Lal turned against V.P. Singh and called him a betrayer. Next, 50 MPs called for home minister





SONDEEP SHANKAR

## What kind of leader?

### *Strike out as applicable*

*Rajiv Gandhi never had an image consultant when he became Prime Minister. It all happened too suddenly. So, he made up his style as he went along with consequences that were at first welcome and then, disastrous.*

*But now, he has to decide what kind of Opposition leader he wants to be. Broadly speaking, he has the following options, each of which has powerful advocates*

**The Sharp Critic:** This is the role Rajiv played during the first session of Parliament. In essence, this consists of opposing everything the government does and ripping it to shreds on the floor of the House.

This approach has its advantages. It comes easily to Rajiv who likes being smart about his opponents; it draws attention to the government's failings; and it keeps the Congress' morale up.

Unfortunately, it also tends to convince impartial observers that the leader of the Opposition is at best, a smart alec. And at worst, a self-satisfied jerk, who having messed up things himself, now gets self-righteous about other people's mistakes.

**The Street-fighter:** The Sanjay Gandhi approach; much favoured by Congressmen who love threatening to 'take to the streets' to prove their clout. In effect, this would mean gheraoing the Mufti to protest inaction in Kashmir; a violent demonstration in Connaught Place denouncing inflation, and taking Arun Jaitley's office apart to complain about leaks on Bofors.

The problem is that Rajiv makes an unlikely goonda. Each time he tries the macho man approach ("nani yaad dilavenge", etc.), he provokes so much derision that nobody can take him seriously.

**The Manipulator:** When Mrs Gandhi had nothing going for her in 1977, she still managed to topple the Janata Party and stage a comeback because of some adroit manipulations.

For Rajiv to do the same thing, he would have to fill Devi Lal's head with dreams of glory and promise to support him in Parliament if he wanted to be Prime Minister. Or, he could make common cause with Chandra Shekhar over the spectre of communalism and the growing influence of the BJP. Then, he could use Shekhar to topple the government and come to power with CPI(M) support.

It wouldn't work because Rajiv makes a terrible intriguer. Besides, V.P. Singh is the master manipulator of Indian politics. So, it seems foolish to attack him on his area of strength. Far better to avoid Manda-style manipulation altogether and do your own thing.

**The 1985 Model (Now! Improved!):** Let's not forget that Rajiv Gandhi won the most massive mandate in Indian electoral history just by being himself. Clearly, he must have been doing something right even if he hadn't worked out quite what it was.

So, he should dismantle that coterie, pension off the advisers, none of whom was around for his moment of glory anyway. Instead, he should trust his instincts, stop pretending to be what he is not and do whatever comes naturally.

The problem is that five years in the hot-seat are enough to change anybody and the Rajiv Gandhi of 1990 is simply not the Rajiv Gandhi of 1985.

No matter. He could present himself as an older, wiser version who has matured through bitter experience. Whereas in 1985, he had the right instincts and no political savvy, now he knows how to translate his ideas into reality.

**The Verdict:** Nobody knows which approach Rajiv will select, but the betting is on the 1985 model with traces of the Sharp Critic—he can't help needing the government: after all, he went to Doon School.



Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's resignation  
And so on.

This chaos must indicate that the government is headed for defeat in the next general election—if not a mid-term collapse. So, as the leading opposition party, the Congress(I) should benefit from the Janata Dal's misfortunes.

Except that it hasn't worked out that way.

Despite the in-house euphoria over Rajiv's recent expeditions, the fact remains that while the government is losing support, the Congress(I) is not gaining it. Even those who regard the Janata Dal as hopelessly inept do not long for the return of the Congress.

Instead, they look to the Bharatiya Janata Party or flirt with regional alternatives.

That is the real crisis of the Congress(I).

**W**ithin the Congress(I), those who formulate strategy make certain key assumptions:

- The National Front cannot solve India's problems. The Congress must therefore attack its failures.
- The constituents of the Janata Dal are certain to fight. If the Congress can aggravate their differences or encourage the likes of Devi Lal or Chandra Shekhar to resign or even defect, then the government is certain to fall.

In essence, the strategy is a replay of the scheme that helped Mrs Gandhi return to power after the humiliating defeat of 1977. Then, she had focused on the Janata government's lapses and had pushed Charan Singh into toppling Morarji Desai.

The Congress(I) thinks the strategy will work a second time and as the National Front regime lurches from crisis to crisis, a weary nation will once again opt for a government that works. To this end, a section of the Congress(I) has been in constant touch with Chandra Shekhar and through him, with other disenchanted Janata Dal leaders. Another set of Congressmen has been cultivating Devi Lal in the hope that he will agree to play the Charan Singh role.



1984

He became Prime Minister without having to work hard for the job. He was not ready for the responsibility.

It is believed that if the Tau and Shekhar refuse to obey the Janata Dal whip in Parliament and encourage their supporters to do the same, then the ruling party will be reduced to a strength of 100 in a House of 540. Clearly, no government can rule on the basis of that figure and V P Singh will have to resign.

The Congress can then assume power as a coalition with the Devi Lal Chandra Shekhar group and the support of the left. If that doesn't work, then it can force an election, just as Mrs Gandhi did in 1979-80 and like her, return to power.

Till about a month ago, this strategy—identified with R K Dhanwan and his acolytes—was the centrepiece of Congress(I) thinking. It still survives—and the toppling efforts persist—but Rajiv himself seems to have

rejected it for all practical purposes. His objections are as follows:

- He has nothing in common with Devi Lal and thinks it will be foolish to link up with him.
- Even if the National Front government fell, the Congress would need 80 MPs to cross over to be sure of a relatively comfortable majority. This is not likely to happen and he sees no reason to form a minority government.
- If an election is called, he does not want to go to the people as a wrecker and a toppler. Apart from anything else, the electorate may well turn against him for that reason.
- In 1980, the country had a two-party system. The old Janata Party included the BJP and there were fewer regional parties (no AGP, no IDP, etc.). Now, a vote against the Janata Dal could well go to the BJP or a regional party—not to the Congress.

In Rajiv Gandhi's view—to the extent that he has articulated one over the last few weeks—a toppling exercise is counter-productive. Yes, of course, the function of an Opposition is to oppose, so the Congress will expose the government's lapses. But that alone will not be enough.

The real problem, he recognises, is with the Congress(I). Why did it lose the 1989 election? And why are people still unwilling to accept that the party represents a real alternative?

Until the Congress solves that crisis, it has no future.

**T**he electoral fortunes of the Congress(I) rest on Rajiv Gandhi's shoulders. Will he be able to convince the country that he deserves another chance?



**R**ajiv Gandhi's advisers have provided him with several explanations for the 1989 defeat. These include:

- The loss of the Muslim vote after the Bhagalpur riots and the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy.
- The loss of Harijan votes to Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party
- The failure of the party organisation.
- Resentment against state governments in the Hindi belt
- The index of Opposition unity.
- Bad planning which led to the loss of 20 seats

From all accounts, Rajiv is inclined to accept that this is *part* of the story. But he believes that there was more to it. He thinks that perhaps it was a vote across the board against the party. And more specifically, a vote against him.

In 1984, he was an unknown quantity and so everybody saw what he wanted to in him. Moreover, he was from within the system—by virtue of his birth—and yet, not a creation of the old, corrupt political structure. Therefore, he was able to attract both traditional Congress voters and those who opposed Mrs Gandhi's dictatorial stewardship of India's fortunes. By promising to reform a system that most people regarded as corrupt and hopelessly inefficient, he held out a vision of change with continuity.

By 1989 however, he had not delivered on that promise. Instead, he had fallen out with most of those he had brought into government with him, was perceived as being as dictatorial and aloof as his mother and, far from dismantling a corrupt political structure, seemed to have actually discovered a couple of new ways of squeezing money out of it.

Once he was discredited, people looked for alternatives. In the north, they found them in the form of the Janata Dal's promise of open and clean government and in the BJP's suggestion that a capitalist Hindu *rashtra* might fare better than a socialistic, secular state. In the south, the alternatives themselves had been discredited by their performance in the state capitals and so, the Congress held on.

The crisis of the Congress(I) lies in the fact that its strategists have not come to terms with this reality. They fail to recognise that people cannot suddenly regard a party they rejected six months ago as the obvious alternative, unless the party itself demon-

**O**ver the last few months, Rajiv Gandhi has been at pains to demonstrate the common touch. The self-consciously Gandhian gesture of the fast at Rajghat was one such move

*trates that it has changed*

The Congress' managers, alas, would much rather topple than introspect.

**J**udging by the things that Rajiv has been saying privately for the last few weeks, he has now worked out his own strategy for the Congress(I)'s

recovery. In essence, he believes that just as he won the 1984 election for the party, he was nearly as responsible for the 1989 defeat.

If he is to recover lost ground, then he must guard against the failings that cost him the last election. Then, he was perceived as being cynical, arrogant, devious, corrupt and cut off from any contact with the people.

This time around, he is doing everything possible to correct that impression.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Over the last month, Rajiv has set aside three hours a day for meetings with party workers. He has been so perturbed by complaints of rudeness on the part of the staff at his 10 Janpath residence that Seva Dal volunteers have been asked to man the reception area and treat everyone courteously. These days, he keeps appointments, ushers visitors in at the appointed time and returns phone calls.

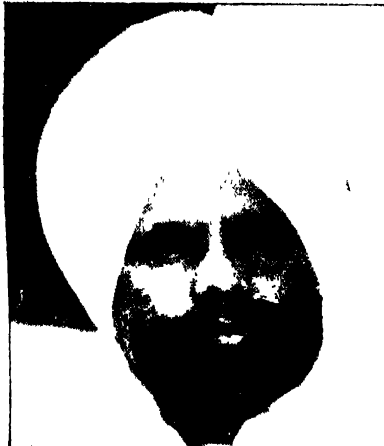
## Exit, the coterie

*Rajiv Gandhi no longer depends on just a chosen few*

**A**s Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi relied on his coterie. His reward: bad press and an electoral defeat. Now, as leader of the Opposition, he seems to have learnt his lesson. And though he hasn't done away with his inner circle, the number of his advisers has increased dramatically of late. No doubt, to deflect any criticism of his relying on a couple of poorly-informed cohorts to the detriment of the party.

It is in keeping then that the likes of Buta Singh and Captain Satish Sharma are out of favour. While former home minister Buta Singh finds it near impossible to secure an appointment with the Congress president, the good Captain has, in a pre-emptive mood, opted to go low profile. He works out of his office in the Aero Club of India, at the Safdarjung Airport, visiting the new Gandhi home rarely—and then only for

JAGDISH YADAV



HAJESH KUMAR



**Buta Singh (above) and Satish Sharma: out of favour**



The morning *darshans* continue and on some days, 5,000 people turn up to see Rajiv (The small lawn at 10 Janpath can't accommodate them and they are usually packed off to the neighbouring AICC headquarters.)

By July, he will resume giving interviews and meeting the press.

**CORRUPTION:** Though the Congress(I)'s official position is that corruption is a media-created issue, Rajiv seems to keenly resent the slur on his integrity

His approach is to be aggressive about the charges levelled at him. During the last session of Parliament, he demanded that the government table the report of the Swedish National Audit Bureau and the Congress(I) wants all Bofors-related papers to be placed before Parliament.

On the A320 deal, he has been as aggressive, insisting that no money changed hands and accusing the gov-

half an hour or so (A far cry from the days when he was butler, chauffeur, chief handyman and food consultant, all rolled into one)

There is a group of ten—R.K. Dhawan, M.L. Fotedar, P. Chidambaram, P. Shiv Shankar, H.K.L. Bhagat, Balram Jakhar, Vasant Sathe, C.K. Jaffar Sharief, V.N. Gadgil and Dinesh Singh—which Rajiv has come to rely on more and more of late. While these leaders are consulted on most political decisions, Rajiv reserves the right to overrule them. And, as he has gathered confidence over the last month or so, he has imposed his will on them more often than ever before.

Gandhi has also constituted a special think-tank to advise him on parliamentary affairs, comprising such members as R. Kumaramangalam, Harish Rawat, N.K.P. Salve, Madhavrao Scindia and M.J. Akbar.

Detractors within the party (and without), of course, insist that the changes are only cosmetic. And that Rajiv is still as susceptible to sycophants who will tell him what he wants to hear.

But the majority of Congressmen are willing to give their president the benefit of doubt. And in the end, that is what counts.



1984

At that time, he was an unknown quantity and so everybody saw what he wanted to in him

ernment of grounding the entire fleet for cynical political ends.

Whereas earlier, Rajiv believed that it was beneath his dignity to respond to aspersions cast on his honesty, he now recognises that the mud has stuck and is eager to clear his name.

It is an approach that will work only if none of the investigations throws up his name or reveals the involvement of his friends.

#### DEVIUSNESS AND CYNICISM:

When he did not visit Meham, after the first poll was countermanded, the impression gained ground that he was in the process of cutting a deal with Devi Lal. By demanding Chautala's resignation when Atmar Singh, the Independent candidate, was murdered, Rajiv hoped to demonstrate that he would not sacrifice his ideals for expediency and that the first impression was wrong.

Similarly, while he has encouraged his partymen to speak up in Parliament, he has drawn the line at bad behaviour. After S.D. Sharma burst into tears in the Rajya Sabha, he made P. Shiv Shankar, leader of the Congress(I) in the Upper House, issue a formal apology. And when K.K.

Tewari attacked Sharma, he disowned him.

#### ARROGANCE AND ALOOFNESS:

Rajiv's enemies portray him as a Fiorucci-clad, Gucci-shod, Rolex-wearing snob, who has no patience with the ordinary people of India. The image is accurate in that Rajiv is westernised and likes the good things of life (though, to be fair, his watch is a Longines and not a Rolex), but he is not the Beluga-scoffing dandy his detractors make him out to be.

Over the last few months, he has been at pains to emphasise his links with India and to demonstrate the common touch. The self-consciously Gandhian gesture of the fast at Rajghat was one such move. Now, he intends to travel across India by train, against the advice of his securitymen.

The little touches have been carefully worked out. When he went to Africa for Namibia's Independence Day celebrations, he flew Economy Class, though Air India offered to upgrade him for free. And the train journeys lined up for June are all Second Class.

He has also gone out of his way to phone people and be solicitous. When industrialist Surrendra Paul was mur-



JAGDISH YADAV



## RAJIV'S ASSETS

- He is the leader of the largest single party in Parliament.
- He is the unchallenged leader of the Congress(I), unlike V.P. Singh who faces competition within the Janata Dal.
- He is a national leader. A Kashmiri-Parsi from UP, he has an all-India image.
- The Congress is the only party which contests over 500 seats at a general election. Both the BJP and the Janata Dal are essentially Hindi belt parties and hence, unlikely to get overall majorities on their own.
- He is still a major crowd-puller. He drew an audience of thousands even in Meham, in the heart of Jat country.
- His image changes quickly. In 1981, when he entered politics, he was portrayed as a well-meaning simpleton. By 1985, he was a charismatic visionary. In 1988, this changed to an 'imperious, possibly corrupt, leader'. Who's to predict how he'll be perceived by 1991? It could be a favourable image again.

dered in Assam a few months ago, Rajiv called his brother Swraj in London the moment he heard the news, though of late, his relations with Paul have been strained (In contrast, Prime Minister V.P. Singh did not even send a condolence message to the family.)

**W**ill all this erase memories of the Rajiv Gandhi of 1989 and reawaken a nostalgia for the Rajiv of 1985? Even if it does, Rajiv faces other problems

The Congress is in disarray and it will take some time for it to be moulded into a coherent force. Shortly after the 1989 defeat, the party decided that it needed a scapegoat. Former home minister Buta Singh, who formulated the disastrous Ram Janmabhoomi strategy for the Congress, was the obvious choice and got landed with much of the blame.

However, senior leaders felt that this was as good a time as any to also get their own back on Rajiv. The first to do so was Kamalapati Tripathi, but Rajiv was able to mollify him somewhat. He was less successful with Uma Shankar Dixit, who dismissed him as a "political zero" after resigning from the Congress Working Committee. Later, Dixit's daughter-in-law, Sheila Dixit, formerly Rajiv's minister of state at the Prime Minister's Office, got him to withdraw his criticism of the party president, but the damage had been done.

The Congress also suffers in terms of its organisation. Traditionally, a party in Opposition appoints several general secretaries. The Janata Dal, for instance, had ten general secretaries, a secretary-general, a vice-president, etc. But the Congress has only four, and of them, only two—H.K.L. Bhagat and Jaffar Sharief—are at all effective. Mahavir Prasad is out of his depth in national politics and Balram Jakhar is discredited as a leader of the Jats.

The old general secretaries (Ghulam Nabi Azad, M. Chandrasheknar, K.N. Singh, etc.) have been made members of a new disciplinary committee, but regard the appointment as a punishment and spend most of their time sulking. Many Congressmen also feel that former ministers and men of substance should be encouraged to function as issue-based spokesmen. For instance, criticism of the government's inability to control prices would be more effective if it came from Pranab Mukherjee and S.B.

ALOK MITRA



## RAJIV'S WEAKNESSES

- He is perceived as being imperious, arrogant and aloof. The Congress is like a court with him as the emperor. V.P. Singh, on the other hand, is seen as open and humble.
- His image is that of a westernised yuppie with little feel for the poor of India's villages. V.P. Singh is seen as being much more at home in the villages of the cow belt.
- In 1984, he was perceived as charming and persuasive. Now he's seen as being impulsive and argumentative.
- He is a bad judge of people, having been let down by his friends and/or having fallen out with them. There is now nobody in the Congress(I) who shares an easy and equal relationship with him.
- Why should anybody give him a second chance? He promised so much in 1984 and delivered so little. He owes the country an explanation for this lapse.
- Whatever he may say, many people still believe that his name will surface in the Bofors investigation or in one of the other corruption enquiries.



Chavan. Similarly, the regime's mis-handling of relations with Pakistan could be better exposed by P.V. Narasimha Rao or even, Natwar Singh. But the All India Congress Committee (AICC) continues to rely on all-purpose spokesmen and misses out on the opportunity to re-emphasise the Congress' stature as a party full of experienced leaders.

Even if Rajiv does manage to sort things out in Delhi, there are still the states to worry about. The party in the Hindi belt is divided by the usual factional fights and does not function cohesively. In the south, the situation is as complicated. In Tamil Nadu, relations with ally Jayalalitha deteriorated before she suddenly disappeared abroad. In Karnataka, Veerendra Patil resents Rajiv's 'interference' in his ministry-making. In Andhra, Chenna Reddy is more loyal to R.K. Dhawan than to Rajiv Gandhi. And in Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar is widely regarded as untrustworthy.

**T**here are, broadly speaking, two conceptions of Indian politics. According to one, local issues, caste and communal considerations and party organisation are regarded as the key determinants of electoral success. This is a view favoured by most grassroots politicians and by many of Rajiv Gandhi's advisers.

The second conception holds that all of this is largely irrelevant and that a general election is presidential in nature.

The electorate votes for or against the leaders of the individual parties and all other considerations recede to the background.

Indira Gandhi inclined to the second view. 'Expelled' by the Congress Working Committee in 1969 and reduced to the head of a minority government in Parliament, she split the Congress and went it alone. Bereft of an organisation and strapped for cash, she overturned caste considerations, ignored local issues and still won by a landslide in 1971. In 1980, she was almost back to square one after a second Congress split and yet, she swept the country again.

Rajiv Gandhi appears to be following his mother's example. However hard he tries, he will not be able to energise the Congress in time for the next election. Nor will he be able to create a party organisation out of nothing. A presidential approach is his best bet.

Finally, the electoral fortunes of the Congress(I) rest on Rajiv Gandhi's shoulders. Will he be able to convince the country that he deserves another chance? Does he have the ability to actually tour India and persuade people that he has learned from his mistakes?

In 1984, he became Prime Minister without having to work hard for the job. He was not ready for the responsibility and it came too easily to him. By 1988, when things began to go wrong, the feeling grew that he was

out of his depth and unable to push through the changes he wanted.

Detractors scoffed and suggested that at the first sign of defeat, he would hotfoot it to Torino and escape from the hurly-burly of Indian politics. Perhaps, he would at last enjoy his alleged wealth.

So far, Rajiv has proved them wrong. He has stayed on and he has decided to fight. But does he have his mother's courage, her ability to remain on her feet when the odds seem insurmountable? Clearly, he lacks both her shrewdness and her ruthlessness. He hopes to make up for those with charisma, vision and hard work.

By recognising that his priority is not to destroy the Janata Dal—it will probably collapse under the weight of its own contradictions—but to rebuild his shattered relationship with the In-



1989

He believes that just as he won the 1984 election for the party, he was as responsible for last year's defeat

**D**espite the triumphs of the last few weeks, Rajiv Gandhi is still far from being the Prime Minister-in-waiting that the party imagines he is. Race Course Road is still a long way off

dian people, Rajiv has at last made a beginning. But can a man who threw away such a massive mandate create a new one for himself out of nothing but his own charisma?

Rajiv believes he can. He hopes that the electorate will recognise that he has profited from the experience of the 1985-89 spell in office, that he has at last learned how to work the system and to change it for the better.

At present, it still looks like a long shot. But at the speed at which things are moving, six months from today, it might well seem less improbable. •

**Rajiv Shukla with Vir Sanghvi/New Delhi**



# The trouble with Tewari

*His brash, abrasive utterances are always creating problems. This time, the Congressman is in the Rajya Sabha's bad books*

**H**e is a professor of English who loves making history—with his unparliamentary prose. And the fact that he is not a member of Parliament doesn't deter him. Recently, former Congress(I) Union minister Kamla Kant Tewari earned the wrath of an already agitated Rajya Sabha for calling the Chairman, Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, "unfit to preside over the House". Neither the Opposition nor the Treasury benches would forgive him for it. Even after he had withdrawn his remark, the House hauled him up and while he stood in the Bar like an errant schoolboy, reprimanded him for his "grave act of misdemeanour" and told him to leave.

Tewari has always had a passion for the front-page. His utterances have entertained the nation, and journalists hungry for copy have regarded the loud-mouthed Tewari as a godsend. He has, however, never been very popular with his partymen. They have always regarded him as an embarrassment and have dissociated themselves from his remarks. So it was not surprising that Congressmen in the Rajya Sabha had no hesitation in supporting the move to reprimand him, and Margatham Chandrashekhar, chairman of the Congress(I)'s disciplinary action committee, served him a notice, asking him to explain why he had criticised the Chairman when he had no business to.

Tewari's strength, however, lies in the fact that he has the backing of Rajiv Gandhi. In 1987, when the President of India, Giani Zail Singh, was reportedly thinking of toppling the Rajiv Gandhi government, Tewari accused him of harbouring terrorists. Zail Singh



AGS/ST/247



threatened to kick up a row before he retired if Tewari wasn't removed from the ministry (he was then minister of state for commerce). He was, only to be re-inducted as minister of state for external affairs a few months after Zail Singh had gone. Tewari was among the most trenchant critics of V P. Singh, when he was still in the Congress. Rajiv Gandhi has never forgotten that. He knows Tewari will stand by him come what may—and so will never let the ebullient Congressman down. Impetuous and abrasive Tewari may be, but loyalty has its rewards.

That is why, even after being reprimanded, Tewari refuses to say he is sorry for what he did. He is bitter about not being given a chance to tell his side of the story. Unrepentant and irrepressible, he plans to carry on his battle with Parliament. "What has happened to me has happened," he says. "Now I will raise the question of Parliament's privileges versus a citizen's fundamental rights in a review petition before the Supreme Court—not for myself, but for the sake of posterity." The dispute, he insists, must be resolved, once and for all.

**T**he controversy began on 22 May, a day of pandemonium in the Rajya Sabha. Congress(I) members came to the House, determined to stall proceedings. When the Chairman, Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, refused to allow a National Conference member to raise the issue of Moulvi Farooq's murder—he had already granted him permission to make a special mention of it later—the Congressmen found their excuse. They rushed into the Well, shouting slogans. They were obviously bent on

**"Dr Najma Heptullah said that Tewari is like the thief who after getting away once, thinks he can get away every time. This time, he is caught"**



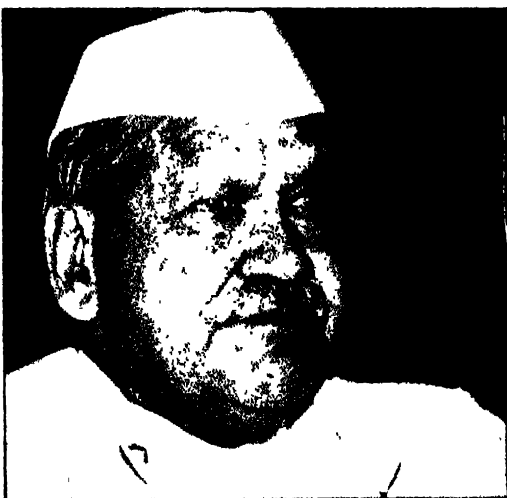
stalling the passing of the Appropriation Bill No. 2 and the Finance Bill, and wanted question hour cancelled. In the course of the bedlam, the Chairman, vice-president Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, broke down in tears over the conduct of the Congress(I) members and, in a fit of rage, called them a party of traitors. One of the Congressmen tried to snatch away papers from the hands of the deputy chairman, Dr Najma Heptullah, and after she had retreated into her chamber, warned her that he would not allow her to conduct the proceedings if she persisted with her "dictatorial" attitude.

A keen follower of parliamentary rows—with his gift for tongue-lashing he is obviously missing them badly—K K. Tewari issued a written statement, hitting back at Dr Sharma for criticising the Congress party, which at least one paper (the *Indian Express*) carried in full. "The fact that Dr Sharma chose to launch his most vitriolic and undignified denunciation against the Congress(I) members and

allowed his outbursts to stay on record renders him unfit to preside over the House," read the statement. Tewari said that Dr Sharma's "utterly outrageous and totally impermissible outbursts" were grossly violative of the norms of the House and against the high standards set by his predecessors. The Chairman's "hysterical rantings" had not served the cause of democracy and his "simulated dramatics", Tewari said, "were clearly aimed at gagging the only opposition party." What is more, he said, "Dr Sharma's concern for the dignity of the House, in retrospect, seems to be less than genuine."

Forgetting inter-party squabbles, the Rajya Sabha, in one voice, condemned Tewari for his attack on the Chairman. Raising the issue, Yashwant Sinha of the Janata Dal said Tewari's scurrilous statement had damaged the honour of the House and V. Gopalaswamy of the DMK described him as "uncivilised". Normally, someone who is accused of holding the House in contempt is ordered to appear before the privileges committee and explain himself and, if necessary, is rebuked. But in this case, the entire House unanimously adopted a resolution which said that if it was confirmed that Tewari had made the statement, he should be summoned to the Bar of the House during the current session and reprimanded.

Tewari rushed to the Supreme Court, claiming that he had a right to natural justice and should be heard before being reprimanded. But the court dismissed his petition, asking him how he could conclude that his reply to the Rajya Sabha's notice wouldn't satisfy the members of the House. Tewari then explained that the House had only issued notice on him



**"Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma called the Congress(I) members traitors and murderers of democracy ... And I reacted on the spur of the moment"**



## "Everyone abused me"

*K. K. Tewari complains that he was reprimanded without being heard*

**SUNDAY:** Why did you issue a statement criticising the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha?

**K. K. Tewari:** I am not a member of the Rajya Sabha. I was not present there. I got to know about what happened on 22 May only through friends and newspapers. I was unhappy with what had happened. I was a member of the Lok Sabha for two consecutive terms from 1980-89. Things had gone out of the Chairman's control and, according to what came out in the newspapers, he had tears in his eyes. And then, in a moment of anger, he called Congress(I) members traitors and murderers of democracy, indulging in *goonda-gardi*. Obviously, these are not the type of expressions that should come from the Chairman. These observations should have been struck off if they were on the records of the House. But they were reported in the papers all over the country and nobody from the Rajya Sabha secretariat took the trouble of contradicting them. So, I felt provoked.

**Q:** Considering you were speaking of the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and vice-president of India, shouldn't you have been more respectful?

**A:** I have the highest regard for Dr

Shankar Dayal Sharma, both as a person and as Chairman of the House. But I did realise that this (his remarks) was not in conformity with the dignity of the House. The Indian National Congress which fought the biggest imperialist and colonialist power in human history and is the party of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi should not be called a party of traitors. I reacted on the spur of the moment. After I had issued the statement, there was commotion all around, and they were pressing for a privilege motion against me. But our members raised this matter and he (Dr Sharma) himself withdrew his remarks. He said he treated everybody as a patriot, just as he himself is. I also publicly said that since Dr Sharma has withdrawn his remarks, I also withdraw mine. And I thought the House would accept my position. I never intended to cause a breach of privilege.

**Q:** Do you think you were let down by P. Shiv Shankar, the leader of your party in the House?

**A:** You can ask Shiv Shankar how



**"I will raise the question of Parliament's privileges before the Supreme Court—for the sake of posterity"**

he was subscribing to this dubious thesis that a citizen once awarded punishment, however arbitrary, politically motivated and vindictive it may be, cannot move a court of law. That is the theory he was advancing. He was with the Opposition on that. Why did his son file a case against the Andhra Pradesh Speaker when he and other Youth Congress boys were agitating before the Assembly and they were accused of having committed breach of privilege of the House? How did he permit his own son to do that?

**Q:** What do you feel about Dr Najma Heptullah's role in the drama?

**A:** Every child who knows about Indian Parliament knows that one unalterable rule of the House is that nobody who is not present in the House and is not in a position to defend himself will be subjected to slander, libellous statements and abuses.

In my case, an open-ended discussion was held on me, spilling into four or five hours. Every member abused me to his heart's content. And some of the most vile remarks about me are still on record. The chairperson herself said that K.K. Tewari is a history-sheeter, within earshot of everyone, including the press. She said K.K. Tewari is like the thief who after getting away once, thinks that he can get away every time. This time, he is caught. How can you protect the dignity of the House when the chairperson herself makes such observations?

to verify whether he had made the statement, and if he had, intended to reprimand him without giving him a chance to explain himself. The court, however, remained unmoved.

The reprimand—on 1 June—came as an anti-climax. With the press and visitors' galleries filled to capacity and the House in full attendance, Tewari solemnly made his way into the Bar specially erected for him near the entrance. In hushed silence, the House heard the deputy chairman read out the reprimand. "The House is pained that a citizen of India should ever have been so at fault and apparently be unrepentant thereafter. This House, therefore, reprimands you." Tewari was not penalised more

severely in the hope that he would introspect "on the seriousness" of his "misdemeanour".

But for K. K. Tewari that wasn't the end of the matter. He is determined to make an issue of it by questioning the authority of Parliament to override a citizen's fundamental rights. His main contention is that he has a right to be heard before being condemned. He is now threatening to file a review petition before the Supreme Court in a few days. He argues: "Even God told Adam and Eve to say what they wanted to in their defence when they ate the fruit of knowledge. Why can't Parliament hear me out?" •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



# Home, but dry?

*The Mufti survives a move to oust him, but his problems are far from over*

**I**t was, perhaps, the most serious challenge to the Raja's authority, since the Tau staged his now-I-resign-now-I-don't drama. The dissident camp of the Janata Dal initiated a signature campaign against Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, accusing the home minister of non-performance and insisting that he quit the government. As many as 50 MPs signed the memorandum, and even after the Prime Minister's publicly-expressed disapproval, 20 others were, reportedly, willing to put their names to the paper. What made matters worse for V.P. Singh was the rumour that the effort was being spearheaded by his principal protege, Santosh Bharatiya.

The campaign against the Mufti began even before the circulation of this memorandum. Only the first salvo was fired—not by the Dal dissidents—but by that redoubtable member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Uma Bharati. She launched a scathing attack on the home minister, *vis a vis* the increased terrorist activities in Punjab, and insisted that the Mufti had no business continuing in office. Bharati was joined by the two Independent members from Daman and Diu, who complained about being harassed by some officials of the Union Territory. They had approached Sayeed with their problem, but the home minister had taken no action in this connection.

The Independent members found avid supporters in such leaders as L.K. Advani, Dinesh Singh and Somnath Chatterjee. Soon, several Janata Dal MPs jumped on to the

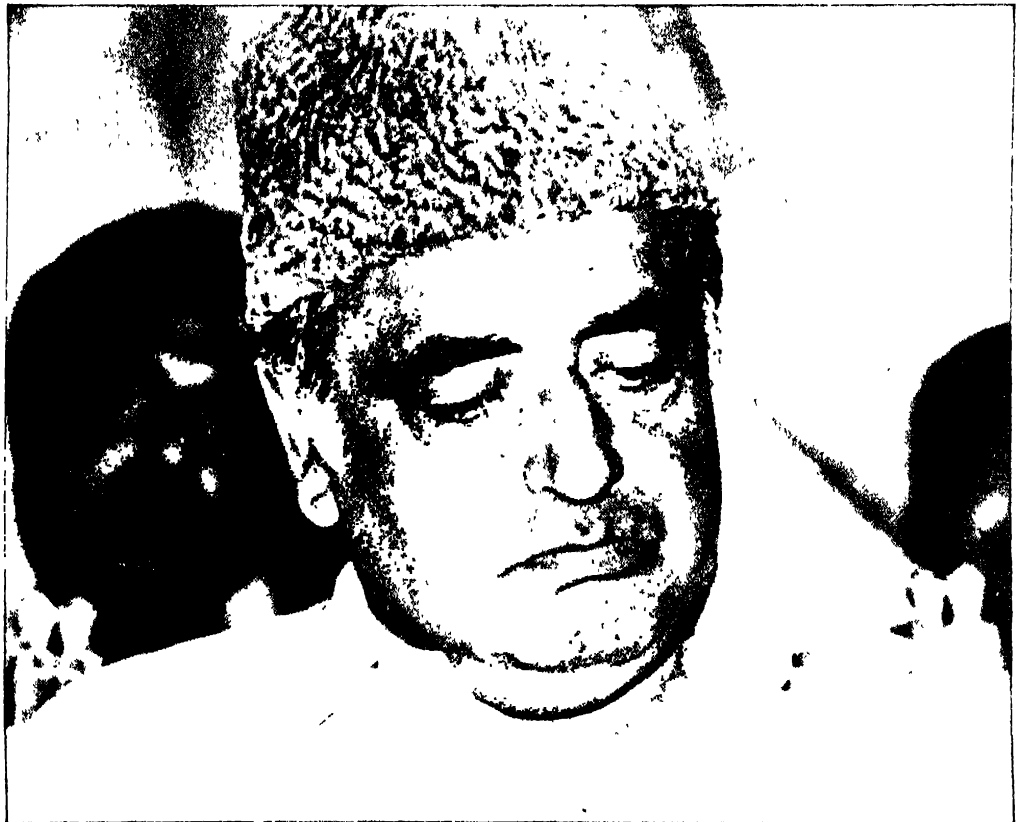
bandwagon, spewing invective against the Mufti. Such ministers as P. Upendra, Satyapal Malik and Sharad Yadav tried to impose some sort of discipline in the treasury benches but to no avail. Members of the House—from both sides of the political fence—persisted with the demand for the home minister's resignation.

Among the most vocal MPs were several members of the newly-formed Nav Nirman Manch of the Janata Dal, including former journalist Santosh Bharatiya. Noticing this, the minister of state for parliamentary affairs, Satyapal Malik, warned Bharatiya that he would be best advised to shut up. But Bharatiya, who makes no secret of his closeness to the Raja, persisted in supporting the agitated members.

Once the proceedings of the House

were over, Bharatiya accosted Satyapal Malik to inform him that he was not involved in the anti-Mufti campaign, but by then the damage had been done. The MP's actions had made it only too obvious which side he was on, and an incensed Malik warned him to be ready to face the consequences.

**T**he contentious issue of Bharatiya's involvement aside, this presented an opportunity in a million for the Dal dissidents. And sure enough, Messrs Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar made the most of it, initiating the now-infamous signature campaign against the hapless home minister. Harunohan Dhawan, Lok Sabha member from Chandigarh and Harshvardhan, member from Gorakhpur, were entrusted with the task of persuading party MPs to support the move.



**Mufti Mohammad Sayeed: the campaign against him persists**



Success wasn't long in coming. It was only a matter of some hours before 50 Dal members had signed the memorandum, asking for the Mufti's resignation, and demanding that V P Singh take charge of the home portfolio himself. Several partymen owing allegiance to George Fernandes, Sharad Yadav and Ajit Singh also expressed their willingness to lend their names, even though by then, the Prime Minister had come down heavily on the agitationists.

The Raja's disapproval notwithstanding, Harimohan Dhawan and Co. submitted the memorandum to the Prime Minister in his Parliament House office. V P Singh refused to entertain the demand.

Aware that Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was very upset about the cam-

to his house for urgent consultations. Khan rushed to Race Course Road, to be told that he had to persuade the Mufti to stay on. Arif disclosed that he had already talked to the home minister, who had been very upset over the involvement of certain MPs said to be close to the PM, in the move to dislodge him.

Khan had more bad news for the Raja if the Mufti resigned, the other ministers belonging to the erstwhile Jan Morcha (Arun Nehru, Satyapal Malik and Arif Mohammad himself) would quit as well.

The threat, though unspoken, was all too obvious. The Raja reacted in his usual reasoned manner. If his ministers resigned, he informed Arif, he would step down as Prime Minister in sympathy.

Criticism against the Mufti centres on three issues. One, his mishandling of the Jammu and Kashmir situation (Dal members find it very difficult to justify the deal concluded with the militants after the kidnapping of Dr Rubaiya Sayeed). Two, the deteriorating law and order situation in Punjab, where the Mufti's performance makes Buta Singh seem like an administrative wizard. And third, his proven incompetence in handling the affairs of the home ministry. Dal workers insist that no action is taken on any of their complaints. And that the home minister is totally under the control of his bureaucrats and refuses to even see his party members on their say-so.

Sayeed may, however, find himself less isolated in the coming months. If



**Satyapal Malik (right) warned Bharatiya that he would be best advised to shut up. But Bharatiya persisted in supporting the move against the Mufti**



paign against him, the PM then called him up to give the necessary reassurances. He had full faith in the home minister's ability, he told the Mufti, and he (Sayeed) shouldn't take the memorandum seriously.

The home minister was far from convinced. He left his Parliament House office and drove to his 10 Akbar Road residence to draw out his resignation. The letter was duly typed to be sent over to the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Satyapal Malik got in touch with Sayeed, and told him that in the event of his resignation, he (Malik) would also quit the government. Malik then informed the Raja that his home minister had his resignation letter ready.

Realising the seriousness of the situation, V.P. Singh called energy minister Arif Mohammad Khan over

The Raja's support to the Mufti's cause was no longer in doubt.

Arif Mohammad Khan immediately went over to the home minister's residence to convey the glad tidings. Suitably pleased, Mufti Mohammad tore up his resignation letter.

**T**he worst loser in this sorry episode was—not the Mufti—but Santosh Bharatiya. Once a principal member of the Raja's charmed circle, the journo-turned-politician found himself out in the cold—despite his denying any involvement in the signature campaign.

But Mufti Mohammad Sayeed isn't home safe and dry either. Janata Dal MPs continue to criticise him openly in Central Hall and seem hell-bent in seeing him out of the Cabinet.

rumours doing the rounds of the capital are anything to go by, similar campaigns are to be launched against such ministers as S. Gurupadaswamy, P. Upendra and Murali Maran.

Lending credence to these stories is the fact that a memorandum against finance minister Madhu Dandavate has been submitted to V.P. Singh. The complaints: Dandavate has had little success in containing price rise; the finance ministry is yet to come out with a clear-cut policy on the writing off of farmers' loans; and that this is reflecting badly on the party. Among the signatories are such party leaders as Kapil Deo Shastri, Gurudayal Singh and Jai Prakash.

Nobody's demanding Dandavate's resignation as yet. And no, the Raja isn't threatening to resign, either. ●

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**



# The state of Delhi

*The draft Bill which proposes to confer statehood on the capital comes in for severe criticism*

**L**ike most grandiose plans of the government, this one too turned out to be a damp squib. After months of deliberations, arguments and counter-arguments, the draft Bill relating to the Delhi statehood issue was finally introduced in Parliament on the last day of the budget session. But it was nothing more than a sop for the politicians of the Union Territory

With the Bill being presented in the House on the last day of the session, no discussions on it were possible. The government, therefore, announced that the Bill could be debated only during the monsoon session, which is two months away. This delay has caused a lot of heartburn, particularly within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which, with four out of the seven Lok Sabha seats from Delhi, virtually rules the capital. For the BJP, which has been pressing for the granting of statehood to Delhi, it is indeed a prestige issue. Not very long ago, Madan Lal Khurana, the BJP chief of the Delhi unit, had gone on a hunger strike to highlight the demand, and he had called it off only after party president L K Advani assured him that he would personally pursue the matter.

Not surprising then that the Delhi unit of the BJP summoned a working committee meeting to discuss the "betrayal" by the government. Khurana labelled the rulers as "cheats", and even accused them of conspiring with the Congress(I).

The city's Janata Dal unit—the party bagged only one Lok Sabha seat from Delhi in the last elections—was, however, more restrained in its reaction, merely terming the whole epi-

sode as "unfortunate".

The Congress(I), which took a severe drubbing in the 1989 polls managing to win just two seats out of the city's seven, remained unperturbed. The party in any case, feels that the real beneficiary of the move would be the BJP and that the elevation of Delhi to a full-fledged state will not help the people of the capital in any way.

council. However, even under the new system, the Centre will continue to exercise control over matters relating to law and order. In fact, the Governor will have "special responsibilities" regarding law and order in the proposed state. Of course, the President can issue orders to the Governor.

Moreover, the Governor will also exercise control over "provision of municipal services required by the



Delhi's Jantar Mantar: will the city lose its privileged position?

And there lies the crunch. While some feel that statehood for Delhi is desirable, a majority, however, insist that the capital will lose its privileged position once it becomes a state. Today, Delhi's budget is five times that of Bihar—a state which is much larger than the capital.

**A**ccording to the draft Bill, hammered out after much discussions, the "capital state of Delhi", which will be the 25th in the country, will have a Legislative Assembly with a Governor at the top. This arrangement will replace the existing metropolitan

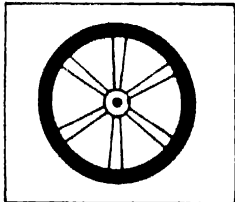
Union, the Delhi Urban Arts Commission" and he will have the final say in the "preparation and finalisation of the master plan of Delhi". The implication is that the Legislative Assembly will have little or no control over these issues.

The Bill clarifies further, "the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final and the validity of anything done by the Governor shall not be called into question on the ground that he ought or ought not to have acted in the exercise of his individual judgement."

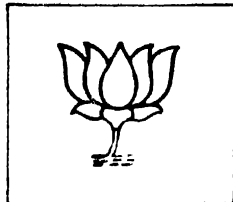
Vesting the Governor with such



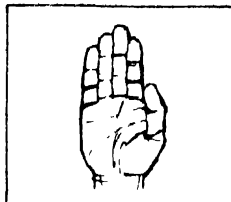
# REACTIONS



Many Janata Dal leaders are not happy with the draft Bill. Though publicly they have supported the government's move, in private some members have termed the Bill as "unfortunate". There is a sharp division within the Dal regarding the nature of autonomy that Delhi will enjoy.



The BJP, the ruling National Front's main ally, feels that the government has betrayed the people of Delhi. The party, moreover, wants a voters list to be prepared on the basis of the 1971 census, something which the Janata Dal, the Congress and the left are opposed to.



The Congress(I) is yet to take a firm decision on the Bill. The party, however, has not opposed it since the Bill conforms in spirit to the recommendations made by the Sarkaria Commission. But many party leaders feel that complete statehood would be disastrous for the capital.

now functioning virtually as autonomous bodies, will also come under the control of the proposed Assembly. While this will increase accountability, there are fears that costs might go up. Right now, residents of Delhi, thanks to subsidies from the Centre and other states, get the cheapest milk and the city too has the cheapest public transport system in the country.

Moreover, Delhi gets many other privileges—water from UP and Haryana, an electric supply dependent on the northern grid, as well as a rate of sales tax lower than that of other parts of the country. If Delhi becomes a full-fledged state, the Centre and states might just decide to do away with the subsidies.

The most contentious issue—the delimitation of constituencies—has also been totally ignored in the draft Bill. In the past, there have been angry exchanges between members of the House over the voters list, should Delhi become a state and elections held. While the BJP would prefer polls on the basis of the 1971 census, the Janata Dal, the Congress(I) and the left parties insist that elections should be held on the basis of the 1989 voters list on the grounds that the population of the capital has increased considerably in the last 20 years. For instance, the population of East Delhi parliamentary constituency has risen from 6.5 lakhs in 1971 to 14.79 lakhs in 1989. "The BJP is betraying the people by opposing the 1989 voters list. The party leadership is panicking because they think that a delay in holding elections might adversely affect their performance since the euphoria of the Lok Sabha elections is dying out," said the Congress(I)'s H.K.L. Bhagat.

Thus, with the BJP, the ruling coalition's main ally, coming down heavily on the government, and the Opposition Congress(I) merely watching the fun from the sidelines, statehood for the capital seems a long way off.

Minu Jain/ New Delhi

sweeping powers obviously curtails the authority of the proposed Assembly. "You call this statehood," Khurana asked scornfully. Janata Dal's Viresh Pratap Choudhary was more guarded in his criticism of the Bill but agreed that something should be done about the 'municipal provisions'. "City legislators must have the power to at least take decisions on matters concerning their own city," added another Janata Dal official.

The Congress, of course, seems satisfied with the draft Bill, since it conforms in spirit to the recommendations made by the Sarkaria Commission. The report had said that statehood for the capital city of India would be undesirable because of the complexity of having foreign embassies, central government offices, ministries, minister's houses, etc. On record, of course, Congressmen said that the final decision on the Bill would be taken by the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC-I).

But politicians of all hues are unanimous on one point, that statehood will speed up the decision-making process of the city. As the BJP MP from Sadar constituency, Vijay Kumar Malhotra, put it, "Now an industrialist has to deal with ten different agencies—the Delhi Develop-

ment Authority (DDA), the Delhi administration, the municipal cor-



Madan Lal Khurana: upset with the Bill

poration and the central government—to get his job done. You have to go to someone for allotment and someone else for a licence. With statehood, this will come to an end."

Agencies like the Delhi Transport Corporation, the Delhi Milk Scheme,



# Pay up, or else...

*Why Parvati Khan's charity show nearly fell through*

**R**emember the singer who was catapulted into the limelight after a Doordarshan official objected to her unconventional name? (How can someone named Parvati have a surname like Khan?) Parvati Khan has come a long way since then. She has mended fences with Mandi House, 'forgiven' the concerned official and appeared on *Pop Time* on a couple of occasions. But when it seemed that things were working out for the interestingly named singer, the Raja and his courtiers snatched the acoustic mike from right under her nose.

So, Khan has now taken to belting out her pop numbers at charity shows in aid of various noble causes. And the 11 May programme organised by the Bharatiya Yuva Sansthan and Onida at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Stadium was only one such affair. But what was far more interesting was that it very nearly didn't happen. If Parvati, the organisers and the sponsors are to be believed, the show was subjected to "political sabotage"—without much success, as it turned out.

While detractors insisted that this was another publicity gimmick, events leading up to the show indicated that there was some truth to Parvati and her cinematographer husband, Nadeem Khan's (who doubles as the coordinator for her programmes) allegations. As Parvati points out: "The show was being organised by the Sansthan which is raising funds for a de-addiction centre in Delhi and has been holding such shows for charitable causes regularly. The 11 May show too was widely publicised and yet the tax authorities were demanding a cash deposit of Rs 2.6 lakhs towards entertainment tax, when normally all such programmes are exempt from enter-

tainment tax." The Khans allege that the "harassment" was motivated by the fact that Ashok Richaria, the Sansthan's president is a committed member of the Congress party.

Things began going wrong from 9 May itself. Parvati and Nadeem along with their 20-member troupe—including comperes Rakesh Bedi, Harish Bhimani and singer Nandu Bhende—arrived in Delhi, to find that Richaria was proving elusive, though he had hitherto kept in touch with the Khans constantly. On 10 May, when he

for the show and were insisting on a cash deposit of Rs 2.6 lakhs. Several committee members of the Sansthan were unwilling to go ahead with the programme as there was no way they could raise the required sum. But Richaria was loath to give up without a fight. Finally, in a last-ditch attempt to save the show he approached Onida for the money. The company paid up.

But until the very last minute, uncertainty prevailed about the fate of the show, though it eventually went off without a hitch and was, according

to the Khans, a "spectacular success".

"On what grounds did the authorities demand such a sum and how did they arrive at the figure?" demands an incensed Parvati Khan. "It's nothing but sheer harassment." The provocation: the singer's preference for the Congress.

What made matters worse for Parvati was her well-publicised public statement that "they (the government) will never be able to buy peace with Hinduism." Khan, however, remains unrepentant. By "boycotting me from Doordarshan and resorting to such harassment, the government that swears by autonomy is only showing its true colours" she maintains. And the attempt

to sabotage her show was only another attempt to appease those who had objected to her surname.

Parvati insists, however, that she is better equipped than the Raja's regime to pass the message of secularism around. And she has already begun the campaign by opening all her shows with a number she has composed, *Bharat ke naam*. "This one's straight from the heart," she says. But it, obviously, hasn't touched the hearts of the Mandi House bosses yet •

**Aditi Chatterjee/Bombay**



**Parvati Khan at a live show: taxing time**

didn't show up for the press conference that had been organised, Nadeem panicked. "The troupe members had to be paid their dues and there was no sign of Richaria. The only thing that he kept telling me over the phone was that there was some problem and he was trying to sort it out with the entertainment commissioner," recounts Khan.

On 11 May, Richaria finally came clean. The tax authorities had "neither accepted nor rejected" the organiser's plea for entertainment tax exemption



BUSINESS/POLITICS

# Spoiling for a fight

*The Tatas are in trouble with Orissa chief minister Biju Patnaik on the rampage*

**B**iju Patnaik seems hell-bent on settling old scores. First, he pounced on his arch-enemy and predecessor, Janaki Ballav Patnaik, his family members and top ministers of the recently-deposed Congress(I) state administration. In early May, sleuths descended on their households, unearthing lakhs of rupees in cash, jewellery, cars and *benami* houses.

And now, three months since he came to power, after a landslide victory in the Assembly elections, Biju has crossed swords with the top industrial house in the country the Tatas.

The chief minister is going around telling the people of Orissa that big houses such as the Tatas are exploiting

the masses, at a time when neighbouring West Bengal is falling all over itself to invite them, in an obvious attempt to create public opinion against Tata operations in Orissa. Whether in the state Assembly or at the convocation of the Xavier Institute of Management in Bhubaneswar, Patnaik has seized every opportunity to strike at the Tatas, criticising the business house about its way of functioning. "The days of *burra-sahibs* have gone," thundered the old socialist at the Xavier convocation late last month, haranguing graduates about declining corporate values. "And the days of the people's representatives (read, politicians) have come."

Patnaik's animosity towards the Tatas goes back a long way. Earlier, during his brief stint as a Union

minister for steel and mines during the 1977 Janata regime, Patnaik had teamed up with the then industry minister George Fernandes—currently Union railways minister with the V.P. Singh administration. Their aim was to get India's largest private sector company and flagship of the Tata house, the Tata Iron and Steel Co. (TISCO), nationalised. The move failed, thanks to some intense lobbying by the Tatas and sharp differences within the Janata Party over the advisability of such a move.

Moreover, Biju was trumped by a colleague, Rudra Pratap Sarangi, who was an ardent Tata fan. In order to disarm Biju, Sarangi levelled a host of corruption charges against him and immediately put Patnaik on the defensive. Morarji Desai, the then



**BIJU** Patnaik is gunning for the Tatas at a time when other states are welcoming them



**GEORGE** Fernandes, Patnaik's ally from the Morarji days, could well be helping him out



Prime Minister, ordered a probe to check out Sarangi's allegations, but the enquiry report was never made public.

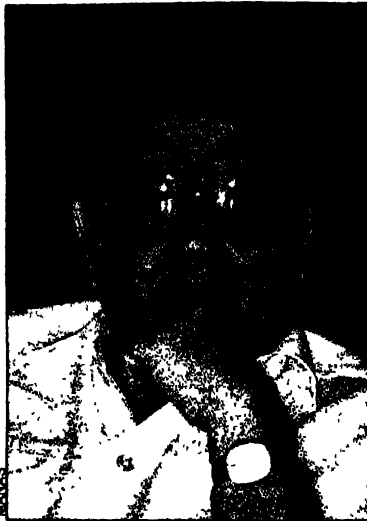
This time round, Patnaik seems to be better placed against the Tatas. He is the undisputed boss in Orissa, and his ally, Fernandes, is a heavyweight at the Centre. To back up his tirade, Biju has virtually torpedoed a Rs 15-crore Tata prawn culture project near the Chilka, India's largest lake.

The Tatas had decided to implement the project through Tata Aquatic Farms Orissa Ltd (TAFOL), a joint sector company, in which the government of Orissa holds 10 per cent equity. TISCO—managed by Russi Mody—is the major partner with 50 per cent of the equity. Ratan Tata-managed Tata Oil Mills Co. has 30 per cent, and the remaining 10 per cent is with Aquatic Farm Ltd, a US-based company which conducted the project's feasibility studies.

TAFOL was on the verge of getting land from the state-run Orissa Maritime and Chilka Area Development Corp (OMCADC) towards the end of last year, when parliamentary elections were announced. Biju, by then a top Janata Dal functionary, promptly announced that the project would be axed if the Dal came to power. He had then accused the J.B. Patnaik government of favouring the Tatas and other industrial houses at the cost of the people in the state.

Biju won, and stuck to his threat. The OMCADC had invited the Tatas in, after its own prawn culture project, planned on a 710 hectare plot, failed to take off. Though Biju is yet to revoke the state government's agreement with the Tatas, his recorded remarks on the project's files—that small farmers and fishermen, not big houses, should be given preference while allotting land for prawn culture—has jeopardised TAFOL's future. The Tatas have already sunk Rs 30 lakhs for project surveys, and fees to Aquatic Farms.

Orissa observers and corporate analysts insist that Biju's stand is clearly "anti-Tata" and point out that small farmers and fishermen in the



**TISCO** chief Russi Mody and Tata Oil Mills chairman Ratan Tata are at the receiving end of Biju's ire

Chilka area would not be affected by the Tata project. They say that as much as 20,000 hectares have been identified around the Chilka's shores as suitable for brackish water prawn culture. Out of that, only 600 hectares was set aside for TAFOL. According to government policy, three-fourths of the area is sufficient for smaller farmers, the rest is for handing over to private companies prepared to make heavy investments.

By this equation, upto 5,000 hectares could be leased out to private companies, and the Tatas would hardly be eating into the less privileged persons' livelihood. In fact, say obser-



**Biju accused the J.B. Patnaik government of favouring the Tatas and other industrial houses at the cost of the people in the state**

vers, the Tatas—in their agreement with the former state administration—had also agreed to provide training, fish seed and feed to small farmers.

Political and bureaucratic sources in Bhubaneswar cite numerous reasons for Biju's ire, most of which have nothing to do with equality or socialism. One of the reasons goes way back to the All India Congress Committee session in 1964 (Before going the Janata way, Biju was a staunch Congressman). Apparently, he had approached the Tatas, say government

officials, for a large donation for organising the meet. The Tatas offered Rs two lakhs, which outraged Biju. The sum, he felt, was far too middling for a top industrial house.

It is difficult to confirm this story—predictably, neither Biju or any of the Tata managers will comment. But it is an easy enough one to believe, and for a simple reason: Biju is single-minded, tough, and when he has chosen an enemy, he will do everything in his power to humiliate and destroy him.

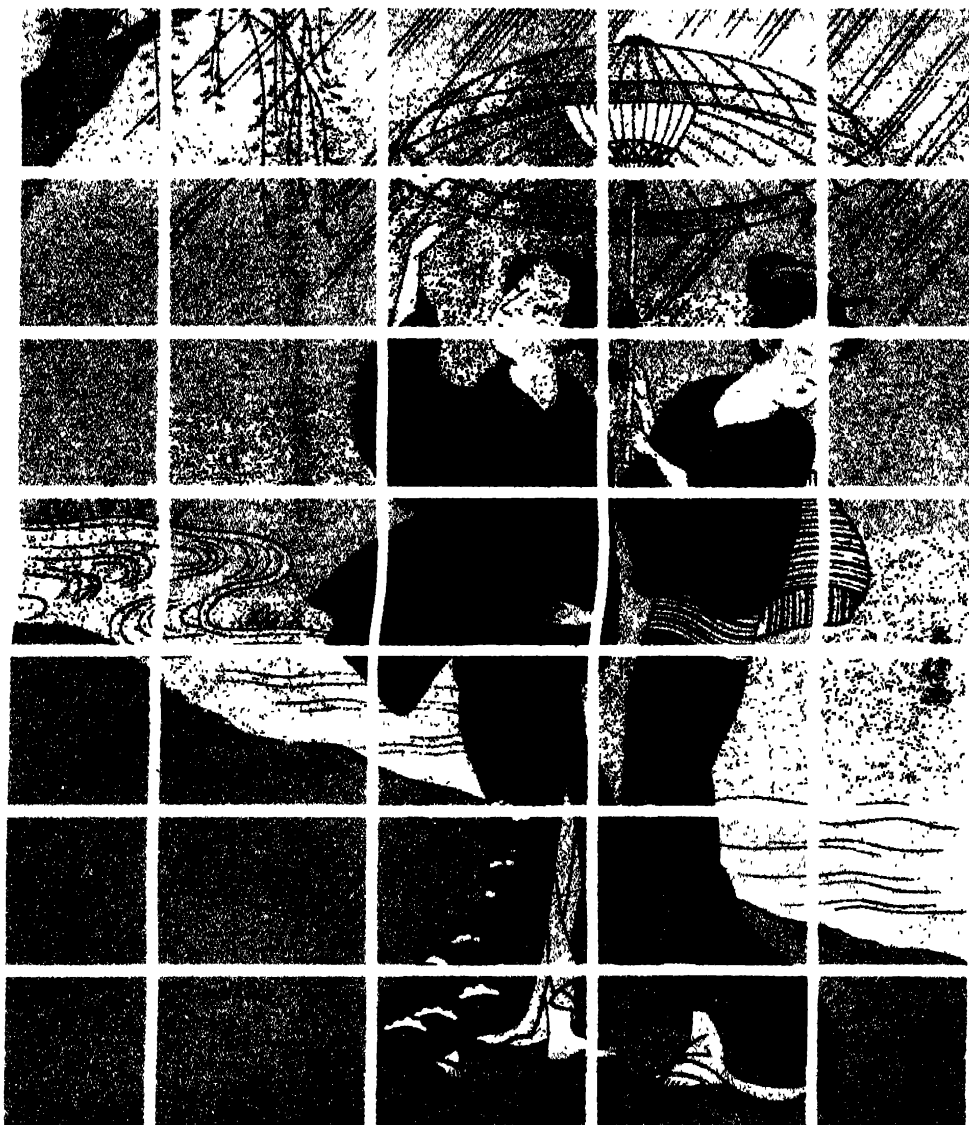
The get-TAFOL move was just the beginning. The Tatas export chrome ore from their mines in the state's Sukinda Valley. Now, the chief minister has announced that the ore be used only in local industries. (The major chrome and allied compound manufacturers in the state is India Charge Chrome, run by a local house, the Pandas. Using the Tata mines for local consumption can only benefit them.) In fact, Biju has already written to the Centre, demanding a ban on chrome exports from the state. Moreover, the Janata Dal has planned an agitation in Sukinda to press for setting up chrome-based industries in the area.

As of now, the Tatas are toeing Orissa's chrome diktat. They are also keeping quiet about their endangered prawn project. Taking on Biju, Fernandes and the combined might of the Janata Dal may be just too much for an industrial house that is concentrating on making friends, as much it is on expansion. But getting friendly with the chief minister could be difficult. Especially after being labelled as an enemy. •

**Sarada P. Nanda / Bhubaneswar**



Japanese state-of-the-art.



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**VIDEOCON**  
AIR CONDITIONERS

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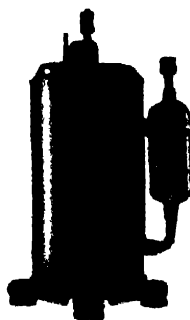


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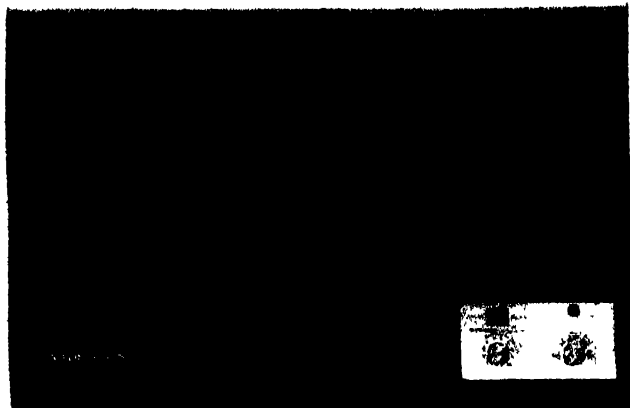
sirocco fan, propeller fan, fan motor and rotary compressor. What's more, the rotary compressor is mounted on a vibration-absorbing rubber base and the entire air conditioner housed in heavy insulation.

All this gives you a whisper quiet operation



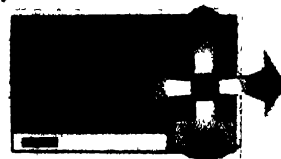
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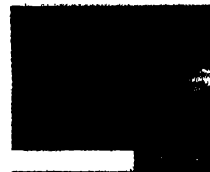
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## CATERING

# Bon voyage, bon appetit

*And bon business, say India's airline caterers*



**FIRST** Class dining, 30,000 feet up in the sky. Air catering is an exacting business

**A**n hour or so after Air India flight AI 424 takes off from Bombay, on its noontime flight to Singapore, passengers settle down and get ready for lunch. In the front section of the Boeing 747 aircraft, First Class passengers dig into caviar, moving on to ham rolls with asparagus, maybe some quail consomme, perhaps a fillet of pomfret *caprice* for entrées, or fillet of pork cooked in red wine. Later, rum *savarin*, and then rounding off the meal with some choice Camembert or Gouda. Back in the Business and Economy Class sections, the menu is less impressive, but no less tasty. Chicken *ukka makhan-wala*, lemon *pulao*, or a *roulade* of lamb *cacciatore*, and pineapple strudel for dessert.

Over at British Airways Flight BA 19 from London to Hong Kong with a stopover in Bombay, the menu could vary. Say chicken canapes instead of ham, roast chicken instead of pomfret *meuniere*, or grilled tomatoes instead of French beans.

Mealtimes, perhaps, are a sacred ritual for any airline passenger. But for airlines themselves, providing in-flight food forms a crucial part of their

reaching-for-the-sky marketing and growth strategy. Last year, 1.3 million tourists and business travellers visited India, most of whom travelled by air, a figure that is expected to grow at a steady ten per cent every year. Not to mention the hundreds of thousands more who fly out of India, either to their home countries, or on a shopping trip to the UK, or for studies at an American university. Plus, the hundreds of travellers who daily stopover at Indian airports, on their way from Europe or West Asia to the Far East and Australia.

**“You can’t serve everything 30,000 feet up in the sky,” says China Garden’s Nelson Wang. “It’s like opening a restaurant in another planet”**

Besides offering roomier seats, better music and video entertainment, smiling stewardesses and more to win over clientele in an increasingly competitive market, every airline is concentrating on that very basic necessity: food on board.

This is where the caterers in India come in, preparing anything between 5,000 to 12,000 meals a day to keep the airlines’ main revenue source happy. And business could not be better. Says Rajendra Diwan, general manager with Ambassador’s Sky Chef, a top air catering firm with a client list that includes Air Canada, West Germany’s Lufthansa, Australian carrier Qantas and Air France: “With international (air) traffic going up by 15 per cent a year, business is booming. And with more and more airlines coming to India, people who can offer professional catering services will be in great demand.”

Exactly how much, however, is something all catering companies decline to talk about. They have to submit closed bids to various airlines, and caterers refuse to talk about how much each meal costs for fear of being undercut by the competition. Besides Sky Chef, there are three major cater-





Oberoi are not doing too badly either.

Since the catch-phrase is service, it keeps caterers, along with the airlines, on their toes. With only four major air caterers in the business, the growth potential is tremendous, and consequently, the competition is cut-throat. Slackness could mean a loss in business.

"It's not always the lowest price quoted that is the decisive factor," says Sky Chef's Diwan. "Very often, it's the reputation of the caterer and its ability to deliver the goods which matters. The airlines' people are not fools. They know if a caterer is quoting a lower price than the others, he's going to compromise on quality."

But that hardly prevents undercutting, as much as the industry may choose to play it down. Says Vinay N

Ketkar, Taj Air's general manager:

"It's inevitable. When one is out to acquire business, there will be lower quotations. And with most of the airlines becoming cost-conscious, a lower price appears to be more

lucrative for them."

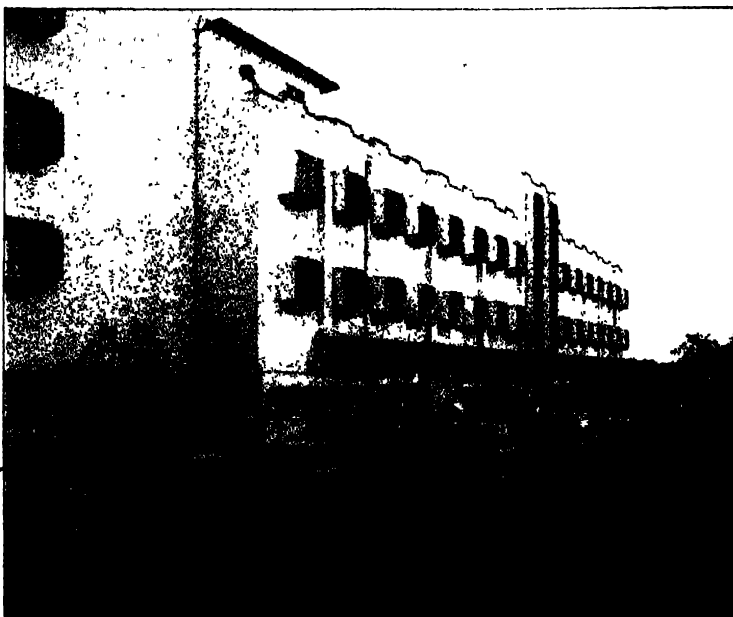
Price, however, is the easy part of the catering game. Quality is not. From cooking airline meals in their hotels, the four big-timers have all set up specialised flight kitchens near both Bombay and New Delhi airports, fitted with state-of-the-art machines and automated kitchen facilities, and managed by a fully-trained staff. In addition, a caterer has to invest in trucks which can hydraulically lift the food containers to the level of the aircraft doors. And a bond department, where duty-free, customs-cleared stocks of cheese, wines, pate or smoked salmon, which are not

**NDIAN** caterers each serve 5,000 to 12,000 meals a day, servicing airlines from around the world

ers in the country. Taj Air Caterers, a division of the Taj Group of Hotels, Oberoi Flight Services, a unit of the Oberoi hotel chain, and Chef Air, a Hotel Corp. of India—which is an Air India subsidiary—operation Chef Air handles 70 per cent of Air India's and Indian Airlines' catering needs. (There are numerous other small caterers, mostly local hotels, which supply Indian Airlines flights to cities such as Ahmedabad, Lucknow or Kharajaho.)

Industry insiders say that the profit margin on any contract signed with an airline, inclusive of raw materials, labour charges and all overheads, is in the region of 25 per cent. And that the sales turnover of any top notch caterer, with a minimum of 15 clients, could be anything from Rs six to eight crores a year.

This is a conservative estimate. Taj, for example, has a total of 31 clients in Bombay and New Delhi, servicing Alitalia, Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines and Pan American, among others. Sky Chef and



**TAJ**

Air Caterers headquarters in Bombay. Stocking smoked salmon is as vital as hydraulic trucks



**The Ambassador**  
**FLIGHT CATERING**

WE SALUTE OUR PREVIOUS CLIENTS

**NARANG GROUP**



**AMBASSADOR'S**

**Rajendra Diwan:**  
"Professional catering services are in great demand...and it's reputation that matters"

available in India, are stocked.

All catering services have a microbiology department where random checks of ingredients as well as cooked food are made to ensure they are germ-free. Sometimes, checks are also conducted at laboratories abroad, Hong Kong for example, to test bacteria content of a meal. Everything has to match international standards. There is no other way to do it. Says Ketkar, "The airlines' responsibility stops as soon as they hand over the (contract) papers to us, and ours begins."

"To most people," says Dilip Nijhawan, general manager of Oberoi Flight Services, "air catering is just assembly-line production. But it's much more complex than serving meals in restaurants because the meal is being prepared for someone who is likely to eat it after 10-12 hours." He adds, "Every meal is like a special work of art: each casserole has to weigh a specific amount and has to be presented aesthetically in that many square inches." Space is always at a premium on planes.

Airlines choose the menu "We can only

suggest certain dishes," says Daljit Singh Bisht, a chef with Oberoi. "Nevertheless," adds Nijhawan, "it's the caterer who ends up getting flak for a badly chosen menu." Or going a gram or two off the track. For example, a non-vegetarian meal, Indian style, must have 100 grams of rice, 120 grams of meat, 30 grams of gravy and 75 grams of vegetables. A weight requirement that has to be figured out way in advance, often before the food is cooked. Says Bisht, "There is generally a shrinkage of 30-40 per cent when

cooking meats. So we have to set aside about 160 grams of raw meat for each casserole, so that after preparation it weighs 120 grams."

Ask an earth-bound culinary expert how it is to serve in-flight meals, and the difficult nature of air catering shows up in sharp relief. In April, Oberoi—for its client Air India—tied up with Bombay-based restaurateur Nelson Wang, who runs the ritzy China Garden, to serve meals for the airline's First and Business Class flyers. The experience proved to be highly educative for Wang. Says he, "The success of a Chinese menu served on board an aircraft depends entirely on the handling skills of the airhostesses and supervisors. The soups have to be piping hot, the courses have to be heated to the right temperature, the dressing has to be perfect, or else you can kill the food." Wang also realised that the menu has to be selected with great care as "you can't serve anything and everything 30,000 feet up in the sky." He adds: "It's like opening a restaurant in another planet."

**Adite Chatterjee/**  
**Bombay**



**INSIDE** Oberoi's flight kitchen. Meals are randomly tested for taste, hygiene and bacteria content



## FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

# Caught in a cross-fire

*And as far as financial institutions are concerned, they will always be jammed between politics and business*

In the early Seventies, when the all-powerful Sanjay Gandhi was tinkering with his misbegotten "people's car" idea, he sent his project proposal to the financial institutions (FIs). He hoped that they would fund his dream.

The FI chiefs were positively against the idea, though one of their representatives did go to see Sanjay, more out of politeness than a hankering to dole out money for the project. Alongside, the FIs lobbied P N Haksar, the head of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's kitchen Cabinet to scuttle the proposal. Haksar, in turn, advised Mrs Gandhi not to get involved with the people's car, which was doomed to fail—at least in its Sanjay incarnation. Mrs Gandhi agreed, and orders were sent out to the FIs to reject her son's proposal, and Sanjay had to look elsewhere for money.

That was probably the last time that FIs resisted political influence.

Today, ambitious and career-crazy FI chiefs only too readily make weekly—and sometimes, thrice weekly—trips to New Delhi to take their orders from the finance ministry. Says a top Bombay-based FI official, who declines to be identified (everyone interviewed for this article preferred anonymity): "Gone are the days when (J.N.) Saxena and (R.K.) Talwar of the IDBI (Industrial Development Bank of India), never visited Delhi and took their own decisions. Today, things are different." Adds a former

FI chairman: "We are just the front office boys, even the chairman who takes the rap when the going gets tough. It is the government which decides everything."

This is true. The most recent example: The government decided that Dhirubhai Ambani should gain control of Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in

Ambani-controlled finance company. This gave Dhirubhai the edge, and he took over control of the cash-rich engineering, cement and electronics manufacturing company.

All it needed was some influence peddling in New Delhi, the blessings of the Rajiv Gandhi administration, and a direct order from North Block



Rajiv Gandhi



V.P. Singh

**The past and present Prime Ministers have both shamelessly trampled down financial institutions, claiming all the while that FIs were "free".**

1988. And so it was. Despite their weak defence in court, the truth is that the Unit Trust of India (UTI), the General Insurance Group of companies, the IDBI, the Industrial Credit & Investment Corp. of India, among others, unloaded their L&T holdings to BoB Fiscal, the merchant banking arm of state-run Bank of Baroda. BoB, in turn, sold the 39 lakh equity shares to Trishna Investments, an

to make the deal possible.

The deal unwound through the same route. When the New Delhi administration changed with V P Singh taking over as Prime Minister, the tables were turned on Ambani. Trishna sold L&T shares back to BoB Fiscal, and the bank passed them on to the FIs. Courtesy the Raja and his finance secretary, Bimal Jalan. By April, the government used pressure



## Major companies in which financial institutions are the single largest shareholders

*And through them, the government. Their influence is overwhelming—and frightening*

| Name of the company    | Equity [Rs in crores] | Institutions [%] | Promoters [%] |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------|
| TISCO                  | 156.34                | 44.2             | 8             |
| TELCO                  | 103.67                | 46.8             | 17            |
| LARSEN & TOUBRO        | 68.04                 | 40.0             | 2             |
| ITC LTD                | 66.34                 | 35.8             | 1             |
| ESCORTS.               | 33.90                 | 52.9             | 18            |
| OSWAL AGRO             | 28.52                 | 26.1             | 23            |
| GREAT EASTERN          | 55.66                 | 22.8             | 15            |
| MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA    | 19.26                 | 45.8             | 6             |
| SPIC                   | 34.00                 | 41.1             | 13            |
| A.C.C.                 | 55.96                 | 44.5             | 12            |
| BOMBAY DYEING          | 11.24                 | 25.8             | 24            |
| INDIAN HOTELS          | 9.86                  | 40.0             | 4             |
| GUJARAT ALKALIES       | 17.90                 | 48.5             | 1             |
| BARODA RAYON           | 17.97                 | 31.8             | 15            |
| VOLTAS                 | 13.23                 | 34.8             | 23            |
| MRF TYRES              | 3.86                  | 22.0             | 15            |
| DCM (UNDIVIDED)        | 23.02                 | 42.2             | 26            |
| BIRLA JUTE             | 20.37                 | 34.5             | 33            |
|                        |                       |                  |               |
| SOUTH INDIA VISCOSE    | 11.03                 | 35.1             | 15            |
| FALLIS INDIA           | 9.52                  | 32.3             | 23            |
| MODI RUBBER            | 10.38                 | 42.4             | 28            |
| UNION CARBIDE          | 32.58                 | 25.2             | 3             |
| ORIENT PAPER           | 11.46                 | 35.7             | 35            |
| VAM ORGANIC            | 5.16                  | 22.9             | 21            |
| UNIVERSAL CABLES       | 5.34                  | 32.9             | 26            |
| MAHARASHTRA SCOOTERS   | 2.86                  | 31.3             | 25            |
| TATA POWER             | 20.48                 | 22.4             | 0             |
| STANDARD MILLS         | 11.06                 | 39.4             | 38            |
| VINDHYA TELLINK        | 3.90                  | 28.4             | 24            |
| AHMEDABAD ELECTRIC     | 18.39                 | 56.9             | 1             |
| BOMBAY SUBURBAN        | 5.85                  | 66.1             | 5             |
| MANGALORE CHEMICALS    | 18.96                 | 44.1             | 21            |
|                        |                       |                  |               |
| KESORAM INDUSTRIES     | 8.85                  | 43.8             | 25            |
| KEC INTERNATIONAL      | 7.04                  | 53.5             | 32            |
| GODAVARI FERTILISERS   | 32.00                 | 50.8             | 0             |
| HINDUSTAN BROWN BOVERI | 5.08                  | 57.6             | 0             |
| VIKRANT TYRES          | 10.40                 | 65.5             | 8             |
| VXL INDIA              | 7.56                  | 37.3             | 25            |
| MYSORE CEMENT          | 19.23                 | 42.4             | 7             |
| BEST & CROMPTON        | 7.09                  | 57.3             | 2             |
| ANDHRA VALLEY POWER    | 10.51                 | 32.7             | 5             |
| ANDHRA PAPER           | 5.63                  | 56.7             | 30            |
| UPCOM CABLES           | 5.92                  | 27.1             | 24            |
| LAKSHMI MACHINES       | 6.09                  | 43.9             | 20            |
| AUTO CORP. OF GOA      | 3.76                  | 43.3             | 10            |
| KIRLOSKAR PNEUMA       | 3.85                  | 57.8             | 24            |
| SHREE SYNTHETICS       | 5.62                  | 33.5             | 22            |
| TATA HYDRO             | 8.0                   | 27.2             | 6             |
| HYDERABAD ALLWYN       | 17.44                 | 80.4             | 2             |
|                        |                       |                  |               |
| TOMCO                  | 8.11                  | 39.5             | 25            |
| KIRLOSKAR OIL          | 5.75                  | 33.0             | 19            |
| KARNATAKA TELE.        | 4.00                  | 30.0             | 26            |
| SUDARSHAN CHEMICALS    | 2.70                  | 22.1             | 22            |
| ARVIND MILLS           | 6.94                  | 29.8             | 23            |
| IPI-TATA               | 12.00                 | 26.0             | 25            |

Sources: Economic Times

to get the Life Insurance Corp. (LIC), which has equity clout in the company, to call an L&T Extraordinary General Meeting to push for Dhirubhai's exit. And so it was, again. Dhirubhai resigned as L&T chairman, his son Mukesh as vice-chairman, and the company's helm passed on to a FI—correction, government—nominee, ex-State Bank of India (SBI) chief D N Ghosh. He is now the L&T chairman.

This was *after* the government sacked two key players, BoB chairman Premjit Singh, and UTI chairman M J Pherwani. Okay, one may reason these gentlemen went along with the Rajiv regime's prodding to get into a shady deal, and now punishment is in order. As for Dhirubhai's takeover, it was only fair to return L&T shares to the original holders in the interests of the public, even if it meant manipulating FIs in exactly the same way the previous administration did.

But what this move underscores is the fact that financial institutions do not have a will of their own, an independence to operate as they wish, despite V P Singh's boast that they would be made autonomous. That, say government and corporate observers, is extremely unlikely. Any government would be loathe to give up its stranglehold on the FIs—it controls public money, private money, savings, investments, and just about every variety of fiscal instruments through them.

A small example: A World Bank study conducted a couple of years ago reveals that FIs, at both national and state levels, provide crucial support to the capital markets—and companies—through underwriting and direct subscription assistance to public share and debenture issues. Total FI investment in this area, all with public money, was Rs 243 crores in 1982-83. Within four years, this had jumped to Rs 1,020 crores. Today, it is more than double the 1987 figure, and growing at almost 50 per cent every year. UTI and LIC are the major players. These two corporations alone have more than Rs 10,000 crores of investible funds. This kind of financial clout is too handy to give up, say analysts, as far as the government is concerned.

**A** leading FI chief is of the opinion that the government will have to be clear on how they are going to play the FIs and the capital markets. With the growth of mutual funds—most FIs and top state-owned banks

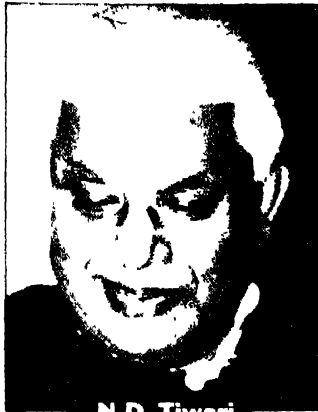


have mutual fund operations—the need is especially felt. Says the chief executive: “We are in the business of buying and selling shares all the time in order to earn dividends for our policy and unit holders. How does one distinguish a market operation’s impact on a management, and whether it will automatically lead to a change of management?”

The reference is obvious, the L&T case. The argument sounds naive, because as seasoned marketmen, FI officials know every nuance of stock market operations and would probably know exactly how purchasing a block of a particular company’s shares is going to affect the market. FI officials are the ultimate insider traders. But the point here is not how they affect or pre-judge the market, but how by following a government diktat they can land in deep trouble.

The FI chairman continues: “Mutual funds, for instance, have to earn a yield of two to three per cent on equity, and would have to resort to buying and selling (shares) at appropriate moments. They can easily be accused of abetting a change in management. One does not know if some clever operator is cornering shares (actually, one does know, and operators are cornering shares all the time, often by following FI buy-sell orders). The problem lies in the guidelines.” It is all right, says the FI chief, for finance minister Dandavate to talk about bringing in transparency in sale and purchase transactions, but it has yet to be translated into firm guidelines. (The Securities and Exchange Board of India has been working on it for the past two years, but it is not yet legal.)

Takeovers, says the FI official, “are not bad in themselves.” Certainly not, almost the entire Western hemisphere survives on takeovers. But in India, the problem arises because most companies are domin-



N.D. Tiwari



S.B. Chavan



Madhu Dandavate

**India's recent finance ministers. Only the administration has changed, not attitudes. All three have espoused autonomy for FIs, but they have not done much about it.**

ated by family enterprises, which survive on political clout as much as they do on business acumen. And as all FIs are government-run, it is inevitable that they will be affected by the business-politics nexus, and as inevitably, be caught in a cross-fire.

Or stay away from it, perhaps because they are plain scared of getting involved. Take Ghosh, the ex-SBI man who now runs L&T more or less for the government. Ghosh is also chairman of Peico, the multinational electronics giant Philips’ beleaguered Indian arm. Company employees have repeatedly written to Ghosh complaining about the management and the company’s alleged financial irregularities. But Ghosh has not even acknowledged the letters. Employees have also written to the LIC, which has a substantial stake in the company’s equity, but faced a mums-the-word attitude. Clearly, Ghosh and LIC will not move a finger unless instructed by New Delhi to do so. And

New Delhi is waiting for the management and the employees to sort out the problems on their own.

FI officials may be perturbed by the government’s meddling. And sure enough, so are India’s business houses and entrepreneurs, whose very existence may depend on the degree of that meddling. So far, only Aditya Birla, who could soon emerge as the country’s top industrialist, has publicly questioned the role the FIs—therefore, the government—play in corporate life. Some of his questions.

- Why do FIs only grab shares of good companies?
- Why do they not ever liquidate their holdings?
- Why should they hold more than 25 per cent of a company’s equity? In this way, says Birla, FIs were destroying the “privateness” of the private sector and the entrepreneurial spirit by being shareholders in a company.

Counters a top FI official: “Much of our (investment) portfolios were lega-



M.J. Pherwani, former UTI chairman



N. Vaghul, ICICI chairman



S.S. Nadkarni, IDBI chairman

**Powerful individuals all, with enormous financial clout. But totally powerless when it comes to handling New Delhi’s whims.**



cies of them (the private companies) purchases. When insurance was in the hands of the Birlas and other private industrialists, they purchased many of these shares. So why are they complaining now?" He adds "What about the risks FIs take with unknown entrepreneurs? It is we who are sustaining the entrepreneurial spirit. Otherwise, we would be supporting only the Birlas, Singhanias, Modis and their tribe."

He has a point. FIs have definitely helped Indian industry grow. But they have reached a stage where the amount of control they have over private enterprise could actually be detrimental to free business. The amount of control the government exercises over FIs certainly is. For reference, it is easy enough to look up the history of Indian Public Sector—chapter, verse and reality.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has also expressed its apprehension about FIs. For one, uncertainties in the management of private companies (Private managers can rest

**FIs have helped Indian industry to grow. But, today, the amount of control they exercise over private enterprise could be detrimental to free business**

easy, say wags, because public sector managers are in the same fix. They never know how long they will last.) FI holdings, said the FICCI, also distort the capital structure of a company. The organisation also suggests that as institutional lending rates are now 14 per cent, it makes more sense for FIs to turn to lending, rather than invest heavily in shares, which brings in an average return of 12 per cent on dividends. Besides, says FICCI, FI nominees on any private company's board should not exceed two, as it would destroy corporate secrecy

(This last point appears to be a little simplistic, as having even one institutional nominee could effectively destroy any amount of secrecy.)

The owner of a leading Bombay-based lease finance company goes even further. He categorically says that FIs often ask for preferential treatment when it comes to allotting shares, and even resort to arm-twisting to get their way. This, coupled with the fact that they usually have nominees on most company boards, would elsewhere in the world be considered unethical, and they could be accused of insider trading. In fact, says the leasing company boss, FIs should induct private industry professionals and businessmen on their boards for a change.

Unlikely. As unlikely as FIs ever really breaking free of New Delhi's reins. Again, as unlikely as private industry breaking free of FI control, or the government's. The situation will not alter as long as India's peculiar system of controls remains. There is simply no getting away from it. •

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**



## INTERVIEW

# "I would have resigned"

*Planning Commission chief Ramakrishna Hegde on Meham, the economy, the bureaucracy and more*

It is said that V P. Singh appointed R. K. Hegde as deputy chairman of the Planning Commission (PC) as a sop for not making him a Cabinet minister. It is also said that keeping Hegde quiet, virtually banishing him from active politics, would help in the Centre's governance. Hegde, however, has been far from quiet and typically, very close to controversy. His Eighth Plan approach paper has angered the economic ministry bosses and bureaucrats. Moreover, the Plan is viewed as being too political, with scant attention

paid to the state of the economy. Hegde has totally bypassed PC advisers in preparing the Plan's approach paper, depending instead on stolidly Gandhian members, mostly intellectuals, who moonlight as economists. This incarnation of Hegde is evasive, contradictory, defensive and vague, a far cry from the confident chief minister who stuck to his guns even when he lost his stature in Karnataka. Last week, Hegde met SUNDAY's Ritu Sarin in New Delhi. Excerpts from the interview:

**SUNDAY: What is your view on the government's economic policy?**

**R.K. Hegde:** The economic policy of the new government has not been announced as yet. The finance minister (Madhu Dandavate) recently stated in Parliament that the policy would be announced very shortly. But generally, the state of the economy cannot be said to be satisfactory. On one side we have a staggering debt liability, both external as well as internal, which amounts to nearly Rs 2,00,000 crores. And, though in terms of exports, the situation has not been bad, in terms of net results we find ourselves in a very unhappy position. There is a (balance of payments) gap of maybe Rs 7,000 crores.

**Q: What is the PC's strategy to get out of the debt trap?**



**A:** We have to introduce correctives so that distortions which have developed over the last three-and-a-half decades disappear. These distortions include the urban and rural dichotomy, the income disparity, increasing rate of illiteracy and our inability to provide minimum needs to the people. Nobody can deny that there has been progress in many sectors, but in terms of distribution of the fruits of development, we have not been successful. It has not been done fairly. The bottom 30 per cent of the people are in the same positions they were 30 years ago. They still suffer from poverty, unemployment, ill-health and illiteracy, with the result that their earning capacity has not increased. These distortions must be corrected.

**Q:** Somehow the PC's policy of employment generating growth does not seem to gel with the thrust of the 1990-91 Union budget...

**A:** I don't think so. The government has agreed to set apart a minimum 50 per cent of the investible resources for development in rural areas. And when I say rural development this does not mean only agricultural development, but development of rural infrastructure—agro-based industry and also the welfare of the rural people who have not got their due share of attention. So, the government's policy and the

Commission's policy are in tune with each other. There is no contradiction.

**Q:** Do you agree with commerce minister Arun Nehru's import-export policy and the thrusts given to industrial development by industry minister Ajit Singh?

**A:** The industrial policy has not been finalised, though, we have sent our paper to them (the industry ministry). Similarly, the import and export policy is by and large in tune with our strategy. In the (Eighth Plan) approach paper the PC has said that so far as goods that are produced for export are concerned, we believe that the latest technology should be adopted and it is not necessary to in-

sist that these industries should be labour-intensive. We have also said that selective foreign (equity) investments should be welcomed. The policy of buying technology and paying royalty has not worked in our favour. Technology changes so rapidly that continuous upgradation is necessary. And in such cases, suppose they (foreign companies) have no stake, they do not transfer the latest technology.

**Q:** Any examples?

**A:** In the field of electronics or in the steel sector, where the technology used is 30 years old. So we think it is to

the labour force is growing at the rate of 2.5 per cent every year. So, we have to provide opportunities for employment at the rate of three per cent.

It has been our experience that unemployment and industrial growth cannot be tackled separately. Industrial development has registered a faster rate of growth during the last five years but this has not reflected on employment growth. This only shows that our strategy was not correct. Besides, economic growth is not an end in itself, it is only a means. The end is the welfare and the quality of life of the people.



NAMEET SANA

our advantage if foreign investments in selective areas are welcomed.

**Q:** There has been strong criticism of the decentralised, rural orientation being pushed by the PC. Even small developing countries cannot afford such a rural orientation...

**A:** A small country can survive only on its export earnings, but ours is a very large country and we are not making use of human resources. The greatest problem we are facing is of unemployment. While the overall economic growth over the last five years has been satisfactory, because of wrong policies, the (rate) of employment growth has actually declined from 2.8 to 1.5 per cent. Despite the fact that

**Q:** This is very similar to the model of development you adopted as chief minister of Karnataka. Have you been successful in transplanting that model at the Centre, at a macro level?

**A:** In many respects there are similarities. In Karnataka the greatest priority was given to decentralisation and minimum needs and development. For the first time in the country we started dry-land farming. Now we are going to adopt this all over the country.

**Q:** Many economists—even planners—feel that the economy of Karnataka is in complete shambles today, and that your decentralisation programme is the cause...





**A:** There will be opposition from people in authority every time you try to decentralise authority. Very few people are prepared to share power with others. But it is not correct to say that the economy of Karnataka suffered because of this. Three consecutive years of drought and poor power generation were the reasons for this (downturn in the state's economy)

**Q:** Are you facing any opposition from within the government?

**A:** There is some opposition from the bureaucracy and that is quite understandable. When we say that centrally-sponsored schemes should be brought down to the minimum, there is bound to be opposition from the central government secretariats—at the higher levels. Our idea is to transfer these schemes to the state governments along with the funds so that the state governments can execute these schemes according to the needs and wishes of the local people. They should select what kind of development they want. It should not depend upon the brainwaves of someone here (in New Delhi)

**Q:** You mentioned the bureaucracy. One PC member, J.D. Sethi, publicly commented about bureaucrats of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in-

terfering in the PC's work.

**A:** I do not know what exactly he meant. But it is true that the bureaucracy (not in the PC) but in the Government of India was reluctant to transfer these schemes, and J.D. Sethi was unhappy about it. But this is one of our basic ideas. The PC should not sit here and prepare things for the states or for a district or for a village. What is needed in Bastar may not be relevant in Meerut district.

**Q:** Sethi spoke about (joint secretary in the PMO) Montek Singh Ahluwalia disagreeing with the PC's figures on the gross domestic product. Do such things happen frequently?

**A:** There was some difference of opin-

**“It is more appropriate to rely on the (PC) members. The advisers no doubt felt left out, but it is not as if we deliberately wanted to exclude them”**

ion between the PC and some of the economists attached to the Prime Minister's secretariat. This was mainly in regard to whether in the approach paper we should indicate targets and numbers. Our stand was that the approach paper must contain only the broad outlines, the major thrusts, development strategies, etc. We said we will come out with the numbers when we prepare the draft plan on the basis of these parameters. The PM also felt if at least broad targets were not indicated, people will feel there is no direction in the approach paper. Then we indicated that overall growth rate (of the economy) should be 5.5 (per cent), the domestic savings should be 32 per cent and employment growth should be three per cent.

So, I would say some bureaucrats held certain views. I would not call it interference. They had suggested we include targets on food production, etc. and we said it is not necessary. We said all these figures would come out once the draft plan is prepared.

**Q:** This is quite a shift from the procedure followed earlier, isn't it?

**A:** A total shift. This approach paper is vastly different in its quality and its philosophical content.

**Q:** Why was the approach paper treated by you as such a secret document? How was it shown to some members of the Union Cabinet even before PC advisers could have a look at it?

**A:** All these years the approach paper was a collective work of the advisers, and then the PC would sit and approve it. This time the members in charge of various subjects wrote it out themselves and that is why the advisers did not come into the picture at all.

**Q:** That is precisely the point. The PC has nearly 30 advisers who are specialists in their own fields. Should their job have been done by the group of members who recently joined the PC, and perhaps do not know much about planning—or economics—at all?

**A:** The PC is committed to the government policy in terms of its announcements through the election manifesto. Take, for instance, the emphasis on rural development or decentralisation. The advisers will not be able to shed their previous prejudices and therefore, it is more appropriate to rely on the members—all of whom are experts. The advisers no doubt felt left out, but it is not as if we deliberately wanted to exclude them. We will con-



sult them once the approach paper is cleared by the National Development Council (NDC)—which it will

**Q: Do you expect fireworks at the NDC meeting?**

**A:** Why should there be any fireworks with regard to development? I believe in cooperative federalism. In the first place, the states must have their own powers and their own resources, and then, sufficient latitudes to execute their own schemes. I respect the states' autonomy in this sense and the PM also has this view. So, I don't expect any clash, though there will be discussions on things like the right to work and employment-generating schemes, development of arid land and development of human resources. These are the issues we are going to take up.

**Q: I believe you have not met all the chief ministers?**

**A:** I started meeting them individually, but because of the pressure of work, I could not complete the process. I am going to do it now.

**Q: State governments are rarely consulted on important economic issues...**

**A:** The situation has changed considerably. Our idea is to associate the chief ministers directly with the PC.

**Q: Then why isn't it happening?**

**A:** Because the (Assembly) elections came in the way. The PM felt that the whole political complexion would change and he thought we should take a decision afterwards. We had discussions with the chief minister and there is not a single chief minister who was dissatisfied. There will be three chief ministers belonging to different parties attached to the PC.

**Q: Is it true that the PC has asked for the Economic Advisory Council to be disbanded?**

**A:** No, we have made no such recommendation. We have told the PM, however, that the relationship between the PC and the Council needs to be looked into.

**Q: Recent developments have shown that there is an increasing politicisation of the PC. Deputy Prime Minister and agriculture minister Devi Lal and Gujarat chief minister Chimanbhai Patel have complained about it. Also, why should L.C. Jain (a PC member) have resigned over the Meham incident? (Jain has since withdrawn his resignation, after Haryana chief minister Om**

**Prakash Chautala stepped down.)**

**A:** I had advised him to wait till the Political Affairs Committee met. But he said no. I did not even accept it or forward it to the PM. I thought I should wait. In fact, I too would have resigned if Mr Chautala had not been asked to step down. I could not have continued. We are wedded to certain values.

**Q: Ideally, shouldn't the deputy chairman of the PC and members be removed from politics?**

**A:** Being a member of the PC does not mean you should have a dead or a wooden conscience. Why did I resign after the 1984 defeat of our party?

**"I too would have resigned if Chautala had not been asked to step down... We are wedded to certain values... Being a member of the PC does not mean you should have a dead or a wooden conscience"**



**L.C.Jain**

**Q: Devi Lal certainly believes that no member of the PC has any business indulging in politics.**

**A:** I think the reaction over such issues depends upon individual to individual.

**Q: You were once a serious contender for the post of Janata Dal president. Does this mean that in the government's scheme of things, deputy chairman of the PC is not an important post?**

**A:** I did not agree to become the president of the party. If I had, I would have had to resign (from the PC) and I did not want to do it and leave a job half done. Otherwise, I would have accepted, and (S.R.) Bommai himself said, 'Look here, if you contest, I will not be there'. Most

of my colleagues said that I should take up this responsibility (to run the party), but I said as long as I am in the PC, I will not take the responsibility, even if it is for four months. (Bommai was elected as the Dal's interim president in May for a period of four months.)

**Q: Ever since Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister, the PC as a body has been slowly declining in stature, and deputy chairmen have been frequently changed at a PM's whim. Do you agree?**

**A:** Not slowly or slightly. You are putting it too mildly. The PC was during Mrs Gandhi's time, and even

later, an adjunct to the PM's secretariat. And old habits die slowly. Now, if I had taken up the party post, the public would think there is a casual attitude towards the PC as an institution.

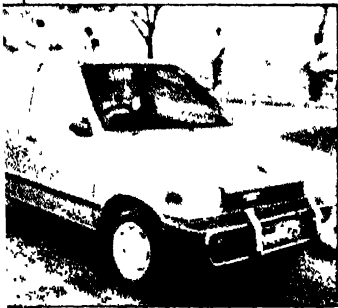
**Q: Is T.N. Seshan (earlier Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet secretary, now the PC secretary) taking an active interest in the working of the Commission?**

**A:** Yes, he is a very active member and has vast experience. I am very happy with the members of the PC and I think they are happy with me. When the question of my becoming president of the party arose, they said, 'If you resign from the deputy chairmanship, then all of us are going to resign'. •



## ■ Revving up

Suzuki has it good. The Japanese car giant's tie-up with Maruti Ltd has worked out, with the Maruti emerging as the number one car in India. Besides, the Yen is way up there, vis-a-vis the rupee, giving Suzuki a windfall in fees. Now it appears that the world's other carmakers, Daimler Benz, MBW and Volkswagen from West Germany, General Motors (GM) of the US and Sweden's Volvo are all keen to move in to India, drawn by market potential and the weak rupee. Executives from these companies have visited India in the past few months, scoping out possible tie-ups with the country's industrialists.



### The Maruti: facing competition?

The current line up: C K Birla and GM, and a Modicon with Volvo. Industrialist Raunaq Singh is believed to be trying his hand with all of them.

The industry ministry would appear to be keen enough on the aspirants, but the socialist brigade, in all probability, would cry foul. Maruti and Suzuki certainly would, too - the twosome have enjoyed a monopoly on cars which look better and work better than those India has suffered for four decades. Too bad, really. Consumers here are revved up, they have no time for monopolies.

## STOCK QUOTE

**"Those who say this is a Utopian dream would do well to remember the dismantling of the Berlin Wall."**

*Finance minister Madhu Dandavate, on chances that India and Pakistan would negotiate arms cuts, leading to a drop in India's crippling defence expenditure.*

**"Sure. And Helmut Kohl is a Kashmiri."**

*A leading New Delhi economist*

## ■ Hurt?

Now, it's Usha's turn. "The suggestion in your Business Diary (see SUNDAY 20-26 May) that Usha is perhaps behind the indictment of Khaitan Fans," wrote a top- and outraged—Usha executive, "by the MRTPC (Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission) for untruthful advertising, is absolutely without foundation."

"Advertising gimmicks have lately been the bane of the electric fans industry. Reputable

fanmakers, however, prefer to steer clear of it, for a very good reason, apart from business ethics—the consumer is not a moron. He is quick to see through gimmicks, and devious advertising therefore recoils on its perpetrator. At Usha we are content to transmit our strengths rather than slander our competitors, or indulge in other hyperbole."

We are happy to publish a rejoinder, to "put the record straight," as the Usha executive insists. But it is very unlikely that Usha's

competitors think like we do. A straight record for them translates to a galloping bottomline. And notwithstanding the MRTPC, they are closing in on Usha.

## ■ Ajit's agenda

It helps to have an industry minister who knows what the industry needs, and to hell with a blind belief in election manifestos. At a time when planners are tongue-tied about progress and think that the best thing India can do is go rural (see interview with R K Hegde on page 54), Ajit Singh has unveiled a fairly liberal industrial policy under the circumstances get rid of case-by-case approvals, therefore,



### Ajit Singh: streamlining

bureaucratic control, import of necessary technology by an entrepreneur without running to the government, provided he sticks to a five per cent royalty on domestic sales and eight per cent on exports. Not bad at all. Import of capital goods up to 30 per cent of the total value of a project's plant and machinery. The small-scale sector has come in for a boost, too. The investment limit for export-oriented units has been raised to Rs 75 lakhs. Only, one hopes the ministry is able to police its policy. And refrain from a turnaround. 1987 still hurts.

## POLITICIAN OF THE WEEK

### Maneka Gandhi

*Minister of state for environment and forests*



• It was too good to last, having a minister who actually cares about the environment, who said industry could go ahead and do what it wanted—provided it didn't ruin the environment. Nothing draconian, merely sensible. Last week, Gandhi's powers were severely curtailed, from being overall boss to looking after Delhi and its zoo. "Industrialists have done it," was the immediate explanation. Possible Pune is a moonscape, Kanpur is a dump, and there are notices in Baroda which say "Do not touch this door: it is radioactive." At a time when Exxon Corp. of the US is paying out millions of dollars in damages for an oil spill, India Ltd is behaving like an ostrich.



**E**ven as thousands of tribals were making their way back home after a four-day well-publicised *dharna* in New Delhi to protest against the construction of the Rs 13,000 crore Sardar Sarovar dam, villagers from Gujarat took over the capital's Boat Club, this time asserting that the dam was essential for their survival. And they were led by none other than the redoubtable Chimanbhai Patel, the portly chief minister of Gujarat.

"Narmada *chahive*," they shouted and sat for endless hours at the Boat Club. And after a rally, they went and met Prime Minister V.P. Singh, who assured them that he would look into the matter and packed the activists off home, just as he had with the anti-dam demonstrators.

V.P. Singh had to do quite a bit of dodging to placate both the groups. To the anti-Narmada lobby, the Prime Minister promised a dialogue on the rehabilitation and ecological aspects of the massive project, which is likely to displace over one lakh people. To the supporters of the dam, the PM said that he shared their dreams of a lush green Gujarat. Like a seasoned diplomat, V.P. Singh made no commitments, but he managed to send both the groups home happy.

The Prime Minister, perhaps, had no other option. Addressing his people at the Boat Club, Gujarat CM Chimanbhai Patel reminded V.P. Singh that it was he who said during his election campaign last year that the Sardar Sarovar dam would be constructed if the Opposition came to power. "Any attempt to digress from the Narmada Tribunal award will not be tolerated," thundered Patel.

The chief minister, in fact, is determined to see the dam proposal through. And he has solutions for all the problems the multi-crore project is likely to create. For instance, Patel promised a one-year employment allowance to all displaced families besides providing them with alternative

# All for a dam

*Gujarat CM Chimanbhai Patel leads a pro-Narmada campaign*

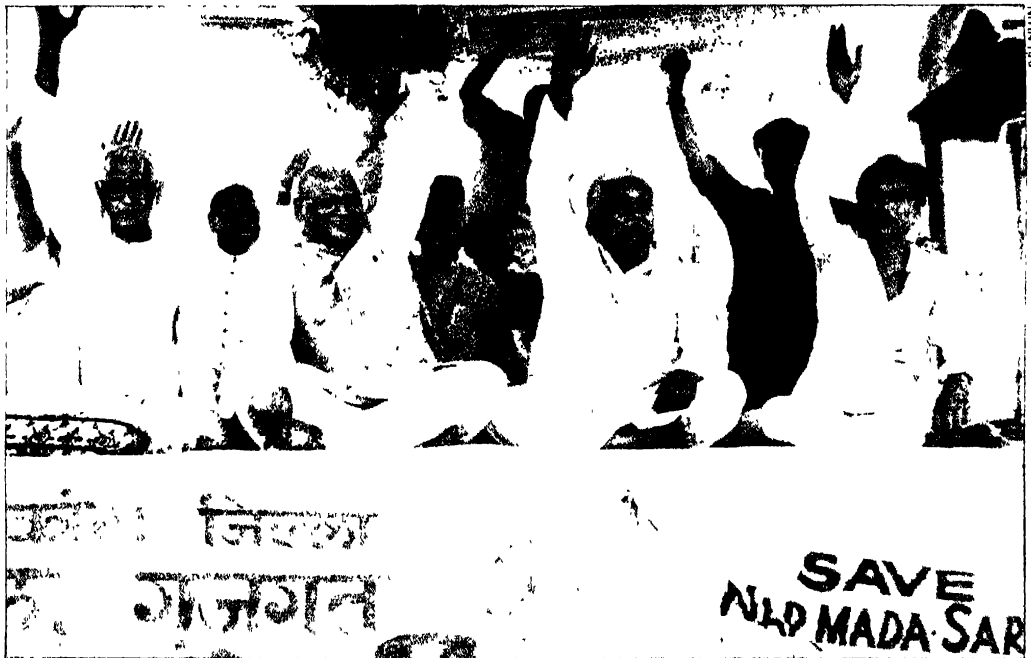
accommodation. And, despite the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra maintaining that they did not have enough land to rehabilitate people uprooted in their states, the Gujarat chief minister declared that all eligible sons of displaced families would be provided with five acres of arable land each. To the tricky deforestation problem, Patel's solution was even simpler—every inhabitant of Gu-

hundred families," an Andolan spokesman pointed out.

The pro-dam activists have based their entire campaign on one point: that the Sardar Sarovar dam will irrigate the drought-prone areas of Saurashtra and Kutch. A contention which is disputed by the NBA.

Andolan members say that these areas will only get a meagre ten per cent of the dam water. Not wholly incorrect since the Gujarat government's booklet on the project too mentions that the real beneficiary of the dam would be the districts of Baroda, Ahmedabad, Surendranagar and Banaskantha—none of which are drought-prone areas.

With both the camps adamant, un-



**Chimanbhai at the 'Save Narmada' rally in Delhi: the issue hots up**

jarat would plant a tree to make up for those which would be uprooted to make way for the dam.

The chief minister's tall promises notwithstanding, officials of the Gujarat government are sceptical about the proposed rehabilitation plans—the job of identifying land to be distributed among the displaced is yet to begin. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), which is spearheading the anti-dam movement, has alleged that none of the state governments have so far been able to work out a feasible rehabilitation plan. "The Gujarat administration has been able to show plans for re-settling only a few

certainly dogs the future of the ambitious project. Last month, Andolan leaders met the secretaries of the relevant ministries and told them that there was little point in starting a dialogue unless their main demand—reviewing the project—was met. The officials said that they would get back to them after discussing the issue with the Prime Minister. Since then, Andolan members have heard nothing. Clearly, V.P. Singh is in a dilemma. It remains to be seen how he wriggles out of the sticky situation. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



# On the beach

*Why is Karunanidhi silent about the LTTE's activities on Tamil Nadu's southern coastline?*

*Place The Vedaranyam coastline, southern Tamil Nadu  
Day 25 May, 1990*

*A bunch of awestruck villagers watch a group of young men—some bearing AK-47s—at work. To the onlookers, it is an odd and inexplicable chore. The youths are engaged in transporting two jeeps, which they carry on their shoulders, across the beach to a couple of waiting boats. Having done this with some difficulty, the youths board the boats, which head for the sea and disappear over the horizon.*

**T**he Vedaranyam incident isn't the first time militants belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been sighted in southern Tamil Nadu. Only the night before the two jeeps were smuggled across the Palk Straits, four Sri Lankan Tamil militants had raised their guns at a group of policemen who accosted them at a jetty near Vedaranyam town. Rather than risk confrontation, the policemen retreated and allowed the militants to set off on their speedboat.

The policemen, evidently, knew who they were dealing with. The Vedaranyam police station already had information that some Sri Lankan Tamil militants were staying at a place called Naalu Kaal Mandapam, some ten kilometres away. It also knew that they communicated with their fellow militants in the region by means of powerful walkie-talkies.

The presence of LTTE activity—which mainly takes the form of ferrying supplies such as petrol, diesel, medicines, cloth for uniforms and explosives for the manufacture of landmines and grenades—in Thanjavur district is an open secret. As one middle-ranking police official admits, "It is something that everybody in the government knows about but nobody wants to talk about." The police themselves are reluctant to check the militant activity, given the sensitive political nature of the issue and the absence of a specific directive from the state administration. Moreover, as the same official points out, it is risky to take on the Tigers, who are armed with sophisticated weapons and enjoy the tacit support of the local population.

**MUTHUVEL KARUNANIDHI**

**Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the Tamil Nadu chief minister continues to deny the existence of LTTE activity in the state**



**Police guard Tamil Nadu's southern coastline: just an eye-wash?**

**D**espite mounting evidence to the contrary, Tamil Nadu chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi continues to deny the existence of LTTE activity in the state. Over the past few months—in fact, ever since the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) withdrew to leave Sri Lanka's north and east under the LTTE's control—there have been innumerable allegations that the Tigers have been allowed to set up camps in Tamil Nadu. Karunanidhi has been accused time and again of turning a blind eye to what the LTTE is doing along the southern coastline of the state. The charge—put forward most vehemently by the Congress Opposition—is that by allowing the illegal entry, he is jeopardising the security of the people.

Karunanidhi's favourite reply to such criticism is to ask why the Tigers should need to operate in his state. After all, he points out, the LTTE is in complete control of the Tamil areas and is not engaged in fighting the Sri Lankan government. And so, it is foolish to imagine that it needs Tamil Nadu as a haven any longer. The DMK chief minister dismisses the allegations as rumours floated by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and by motivated politicians in the Opposition.

While Karunanidhi's argument may appear to have an air of plausibility, it has failed to convince his detractors. For even though the LTTE is not at





war with Colombo, there is every likelihood that the negotiations that are on between the two may break down. And the Tigers could well be preparing to establish some kind of base in Tamil Nadu in the event of this happening.

To be fair to Karunanidhi though, there has been no concrete evidence unearthed so far of the presence of LTTE camps in the state. However, as the Vedaranyam and other incidents have shown, it would be foolish to imagine that the organisation is not engaged in smuggling supplies across the Palk Straits. Privately, the state's senior bureaucrats say that it is impossible to check such activity. Says one: "We could place all our policemen along the southern coastline but then what do we do about maintaining law and order in Tamil Nadu?"

The state administration also argues that it won't do to blame only the Tamil Nadu government for what is going on as it is also the duty of the coast guard and the customs—both central organisations—to check such activity. To emphasise this point, the state government has formally requested New Delhi twice to ask the Border Security Force (BSF) to man the coastline in Thanjavur and Ramnathapuram districts. Asks a senior police official: "They have the BSF on the Pakistan border in Kashmir and Punjab. Why not here on the Sri Lankan border?"

All the same, New Delhi—which has conducted its own investigations—appears convinced that there is subst-

ance in the charge that Karunanidhi is helping the LTTE in its bid to acquire supplies from the state. But Karunanidhi—who had taken on the role of playing the chief mediator between the various Sri Lankan Tamil groups—either doesn't care or is not listening.

**U**nofficially, the Tamil Nadu government's position seems to be that too much is being made of a few stray incidents, considering that there has been Eelam-related activity in the state over the last seven years. Recently, chief minister Karunanidhi pointed out in the Assembly that several Lankan militant camps had existed in Tamil Nadu when the late Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi was publicly denying their existence. And that his government—despite the many allegations about its pro-LTTE stance—had closed down all such training camps.

While it is true that all camps belonging to non-LTTE organisations have been closed down, there's no denying that the Tigers still get their supplies from Tamil Nadu. There may no longer be LTTE training camps, but there are small, thatched huts along the southern coast of Tamil Nadu with facilities for loading and unloading 'supplies' for the 'Eelam ferry service'. The Tigers are careful about keeping the peace and—except for a few stray instances—have not caused any disturbance.

The rival Lankan militant outfits are not so well off. Most of these groups are now without a base, having fled from Sri Lanka after the deinduction

of the IPKF for fear of the wrath of the LTTE. Karunanidhi denied the refugees entry into Tamil Nadu and, finally, they were given shelter in Orissa. But many of them did not like it there and have tried to sneak into Tamil Nadu.

The women and children who returned were kept at the Mandapam camp near Rameswaram. However, the men, from a 15-year-old boy to a 60-year-old man, were locked up in jails because the chief minister felt the "trained militants" were a security threat. The detenus went on a fast inside the prison and were finally allowed to join their families at Mandapam. "We could have as well stayed back in Sri Lanka and died of LTTE bullets, instead of coming across to Tamil Nadu in the hope of getting protection and understanding and landing up in jails," said a Tamil youth at the Mandapam camp. He swore that he was just a fisherman and not a member of any militant group rival to the LTTE.

**B**ut when it comes to the LTTE, the state government seems remarkably unconcerned about its activities. However, Tiger spokesman Anton Balasingham said in an interview in Colombo: "We don't have any bases in Tamil Nadu. Mr Karunanidhi had asked us to open an office, but we haven't done so. Most of our men have returned here because of the present climate in Tamil Nadu."

He also strongly denied that the LTTE was providing training in arms to members of the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), as the Indian media seem to believe. The DK is the mother orga-



**ANTON BALASINGHAM**

**The LTTE spokesman says:**  
"Our political objective is not to instigate any secessionist movement in Tamil Nadu... The LTTE will not get involved"





• According to Karunanidhi, there are no longer any camps for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in his state



• Tamil Nadu refused to grant them entry and the refugees were finally given shelter in Orissa

nisation of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which, during its formative years, advocated secession under the garb of state autonomy. Though the DMK founder, the late C. N. Annadurai, had publicly announced his party was giving up the demand for a separate Tamil nation, doubts still persist about Karunanidhi's intentions. His critics even say that he is using the friendly DK to further secessionist goals.

But Balasingham insisted, "Our political objective is not to instigate any secessionist movement in Tamil

Nadu. The LTTE will not get involved in secessionist struggles in India." His denial was prompted not only by charges that the Tigers were training DK and DMK men in Tamil Nadu and Jaffna, but also by allegations that they had links with Sikh militants. However, Balasingham's statements do not calm fears about the resurgence of Tamil nationalist sentiments. Such feelings have been voiced of late at meetings organised by pro-LTTE outfits. That the DMK government has done little to prevent such gatherings has led to alarm, specially

among the rulers in Delhi.

One of the prominent pro-LTTE political figures in Tamil Nadu is P. Nedumaran, who has recently rechristened his Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress as the Tamil National Movement. Once a Congressman, he now feels that the charge that the LTTE is a threat to Indian unity is grossly exaggerated. Even before Independence, there was a movement in Bengal seeking a separate nation for the Bengalis, besides India and Pakistan, he points out. Though that movement continued to find support among certain sections of the people in West Bengal, the Government of India did not hesitate to extend all support to the Bengalis of East Bengal in their struggle for liberation from Pakistan. "Why then this suspicion against Tamil Nadu Tamils now, when you did not suspect the people of West Bengal while creating Bangladesh?" asks Nedumaran.

According to Nedumaran, all this talk of increased LTTE presence in Tamil Nadu is the creation of the Congress(I) and the Research and Analysis Wing. While the Congress is inspiring rumours to divert attention

from the fact that Rajiv Gandhi's Lankan policy has failed, the "RAW is spreading false propaganda to ultimately suppress and destroy the growing Tamil nationalism in the state."

But such explanations do not convince many. And media reports continue to focus attention on the LTTE's unchecked activities in the state. Karunanidhi may be able to ignore this for the moment. But his problems will begin if the LTTE presence becomes a security threat to his people.

**R. Bhagwan Singh/ Rameswaram and Madras**



# Value-based journalism

*Can Pritish Nandy's persecution of J.B. Patnaik be so described?*



Messrs Bennet, Coleman (which is the fancy name in which the real proprietors glory—a family of very vegetarian, very *rajasik* Jains), defendants in the Rs 1 crore defamation case brought against them by former Orissa chief minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik, have in their employ the cause of it all Pritish Nandy, the very non-vegetarian, very *tamasik* editor of what used to be a magazine eminently suitable for family reading *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

Nandy is infuriated that J.B. Patnaik has raised the question of "value-based politics" in the context of a series of vicious raids organised last month against him and his family by the present Janata Dal chief minister of Orissa, that model of value-based rectitude, Shri Biju Patnaik.

Now, Nandy himself is no less "value-based" than Biju Patnaik. He cannot, he believes, but open his mouth, take up a pen or clatter away at a typewriter without the truth pouring out like the Ganga at Gaumukhteswar.

Unlike political pamphleteers such as Santosh Bhartiya and myself (who are in politics rather than journalism and resort to the media to propagate an avowed political objective), Nandy and his (regrettably expanding) ilk regard themselves as "objective" paragons of disinterested journalism, above the play of political passion, dedicated to the Truth alone, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth ("Because", as Nandy's stable-mate in smugness, conceit and self-righteousness puts it, "The Truth Involves Us All").

And in nothing so much as the J.B. Patnaik case has Nandy succeeded in persuading himself, and portraying to others, the image of himself and his colleagues in *The Weekly* as a band of peerless journalists, fearless, upright, honest, persecuted by a grubby politician, a sexual pervert and megalomaniac who will resort to any trick, however mean, however low, however demeaning to curb the freedom of the press, which is seeking valiantly to throw open to a bewildered and bemused public the skeletons lurking in every Congress cupboard in Orissa. To his aid have rushed the "liberals", the Editors' Guild, the Knights of Freedom in spotless armour

naik to the PM—lists the assests to be accounted for by J.B. Patnaik as a mere Rs 1.5 lakh in bank deposits, a DDA flat valued at Rs 3 lakhs and "investment in an orchard of Rs 8 lakhs", was denied by Patnaik as "disinformation". That's all.

Where are Nandy's "crores of rupees"? Nandy will, of course, promptly cover himself by saying that he was talking not only of J.B. Patnaik but also of his "friends and relatives". They are not at issue here. J.B. Patnaik is. I cite this as a typical example of Pritish Nandy's penchant for *suggestio falsi*, that is, the construction of sentences which, in some technical sense, say one thing but are expressly designed to plant something quite different in the readers' mind.

So, let's go back to the beginning of the whole sordid business.

It was the week of the 18–24 May 1966. I received a trunk-call from Pritish Nandy. He was beside himself with excitement. Cackling, sniggering, expostulating (expletives deleted) he asked whether I had read the latest *Weekly* with his expose of J.B. Patnaik, banner-headlined "Shocking!"

I told him that, as I was a literate person of delicate sensibilities and

some refinement of taste, I did not usually read *The Weekly*. He begged me to see this issue: it was a real scorcher, he said, he'd really socked it to the "b...". I promised I would. Before ringing off, Pritish asked solicitously, "And how are you, my dear friend?" And I replied, "Since I am 500 miles from your peep-hole, very well indeed, thank you."

Then, taking care to see that the children were asleep, the doors firmly locked, the curtains pulled, I took out the famous issue, unwrapped its brown-paper covering, and threw my-



**Pritish Nandy is totally taken in by the "value-based politics" of the Janata Dal. He "shuts his eyes" to anything that might tarnish the image of V.P. Singh and his cohorts.**

Perhaps we should now look for the Truth—because the Truth does, indeed, involve us all.

**T**he raids, says Nandy, in the page he has reserved all for himself (*Editor's Choice, Weekly*, 27 May–2 June 1990) have "reportedly (his word, doubtless, to cover himself) uncovered cash, ornaments and undeclared assets running into crores of rupees".

If it is virtue, not vendetta that Nandy is after, surely he should have added that the same "reports"—and letter "reportedly" sent by J.B. Pat-



self full-frontal upon what must surely rank as the most scatalogical example of salacious sensationalism ever thrown at an unsuspecting public by the Old Lady of Borj Bunder—and that too in a magazine to which I had been introduced in my pre-pubescent innocence by Aunt Wendy and her delightful competitions for children (Nandy, of course, has only one use for Aunt Wendy—but may we, please, not go into that?)

The piece was by Nandy's correspondent in Bhubaneswar, S.N.M. Abdi. "One hears plenty of stories about Patnaik," wrote Abdi, "stories of his alleged libidinal involvement with a series of women. And men."

He then proceeded to substantiate the allegations with three specific cases. First, the testimony of a young man, identity disguised as "Raju Jena." Second, a woman called Sebarani Das. Third, a "young widow", not named but identified as the daughter of a man to whom J.B. Patnaik has granted a dealership for Orissa Textiles Mills Products in exchange, it was claimed, for favours granted to Patnaik by the man's daughter, "the young widow". Three specific stories—to give verisimilitude to the allegations and substance to the pulchritude.

Initially, J.B. Patnaik took no legal action. The story had caused a sensation—as it was intended to. The personal reputation of Janaki Ballav Patnaik was in shreds. The future of a chief minister, who, barely a year earlier, had won a massive renewed mandate from his people, was in jeopardy. Nandy preened himself in undisguised satisfaction. Asked by *India Today* what he would do if a criminal case were instituted, Nandy cockily replied that "he would be more than willing to take on Mr Patnaik."

"Raju Jena's" story was tragic, graphic and recounted in quotes. But what most readers would have missed is that while the dreadful tale was told in quotes, there was no authentication that the words used were Jena's own. What Abdi did was to sum up the story in his own words and then put it into Jena's mouth! This devious sleight-of-hand is revealed in the sentence introducing the quote: "The sum total of Jena's statement is"—not, as you can see, Jena's words but Abdi's.

"Raju Jena" was, of course, a name invented by Abdi to disguise the man's identity. But was the story also invented to disguise the truth?



I would call as my first witness a man who deeply dislikes the Congress as a party and loathes J.B. Patnaik as a person. He is, moreover, a member of Nandy's journalist fraternity, dedicated, one trusts, as fervently as Nandy says he is, to the "freedom of the press." Farzand Ahmed, *India Today's* correspondent in Bhubaneswar.

Farzand tracked down the real Raju Jena. In Farzand Ahmed's words (*India Today*, 16—30 June 1986)

"The youth who *The Weekly* claimed had been molested by Patnaik in his office was identified as Vishwanath Sethi of Bahapatna village in Puri district."

Farzand revealed that *The Weekly's* correspondent had been led to Vishwanath Sethi by an aide of Biju Patnaik (J.B. Patnaik's implacable enemy and then leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly). The aide had bribed the man into talking to *The*

*Weekly* by promising, on Biju Patnaik's behalf, that the unemployed youth would be given a job. Since the Truth Involves Us All, should not *The Weekly's* correspondent (or, at any rate, editor Prithvi Nandy) have told his readers that the whole scam was set up by the political rivals of the chief minister—in a manner calculated not only to politically damage J.B. Patnaik (which, in a democracy, is fair enough), but also to utterly demean and disgrace him in the eyes of his wife, his children, his friends and, for aught I know, his aged parents?

Who should be given credence to? Journalist Abdi, who claims he tape-recorded Jena alias Sethi, but has never produced the tape-recording and does NOT quote Jena/Sethi's words? Or Journalist Farzand Ahmed, who correctly identifies the alleged victim, details the circumstances of *The Weekly's* meeting with this so-called "prey" to the chief minister's lust, and quotes him in his own words?





**J.B. Patnaik** has raised the question of "value-based politics" in the context of a series of vicious raids organised by the Janata Dal chief minister of Orissa, that model of rectitude, **Biju Patnaik** (above)

**N**ext, the woman Abdi can hardly contain his joy in telling her story "Detailed documentary evidence exists," claims Abdi, "in at least one case involving Patnaik with a woman called Sebarani Das." Now, the readers of *The Weekly* are sticklers for facts, chaps (and chappies) who like nothing better than a document or two on which to cut their milk-teeth. Titillated by the promise of "documentary evidence", the poor, duped public who buy *The Weekly* (and those like me who have it sent to them by editor Nandy as unsolicited junk mail) are, thus, mentally readied by S N M Abdi for the *coup de grace*.

The "documentary evidence" adduced by him is a letter from the manager of a Bhubaneswar government guest house to his superior complaining that, in the middle of the night, at about 4 am, Sebarani Das was put into a suite (booked for another party) by an assistant of the chief minister's, where she had con-

tinued to stay for fifty-two days without paying the bills. She said the bills were to be sent to the chief minister! He, poor man, was in despair as to how to collect his dues—and tender a satisfactory explanation to the irate party who had been turfed out of the suite they had booked (but not, it seems, occupied even though it was 4 am in the middle of the night!)

Please note that there is not a word in the "documentary evidence" about Janaki Ballav Patnaik's sexual peccadilloes. Then what are the documents meant to prove? Nothing—except Abdi's totally unrelated assertion, for which there is NO "documentary evidence", that Sebarani Das was sexually abused by J B Patnaik in exchange for money granted from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

To prove my point, may I, M'Lord, call my second witness S.N.M Abdi himself. What? Abdi? Yes, M'Lord, Abdi. For, in the very same issue of *The Weekly* is an interview granted by

the self same Sebarani Das to the self-same Abdi.

In the interview, Sebarani Das confesses to having met the chief minister—a man whom *The Weekly* castigates as a libidinous pervert abusing his high office to exploit women (and young men) in distress—"only once, in his chambers." Abdi asks her whether the chief minister ever visited her in the guest house. To which Sebarani replies "Never. He is a saint. He took pity on this poor woman."

Is this the voice of a woman raped by a power-crazed megalomaniac?

**L**et's take the third "authenticated" story. The lady concerned is not named. But Abdi describes her as a "young widow" in great economic distress who approached the chief minister because she wanted to secure for her father a dealership for Orissa Textiles Mills Products. For Abdi, the clinching evidence of the horrors to which J B Patnaik subjected the lady is—but why should I tell it in my words? Let Abdi speak for himself.

"In the course of the investigation into the private life of Patnaik, *The Weekly* came across a letter addressed to Sonia Gandhi. The letter is purported (notice him running for cover) to have been written by a young woman."

Abdi goes on to claim that an infuriated Sonia Gandhi had ordered the official machinery to move against J B Patnaik.

May I, My Lord, recall as my next witness Farzand Ahmed of *India Today*? Our interpid Farzand identified the young widow as Suktani Hota of Jharsuguda. She issued a statement saying "she was being unnecessarily dragged into the controversy and denying that she had written to Sonia Gandhi complaining against Patnaik."

On these absurd nothingnesses, Pritish Nandy and S N M Abdi have built a huge fund of sympathy—not for the target of their attack but for themselves.

Nandy's latest diatribe (*Weekly*, 27 May, 1990) describes J B Patnaik as the "politician who has perhaps (thank you, Pritish, for the 'perhaps') the worst track record in harassing and intimidating the press. We should know. His cops yanked copies of *The Weekly* off the trains and news-stands in Orissa."

For one last time, I turn again to Farzand Ahmed of *India Today*:



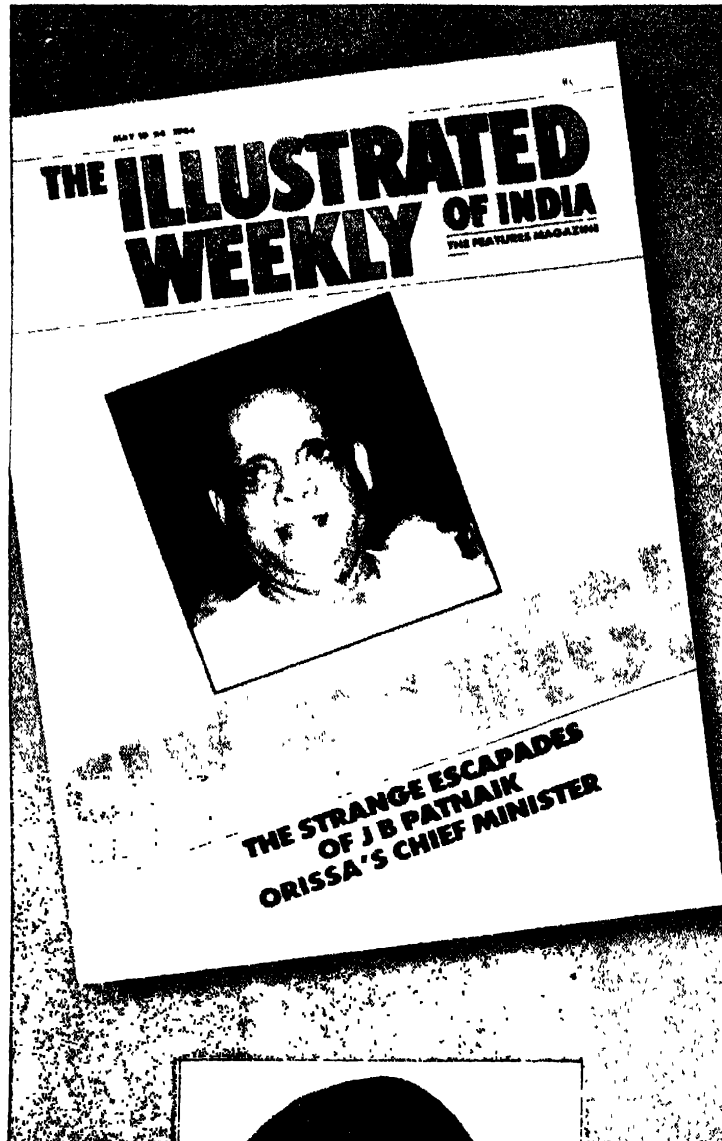
"Official pressure held up *The Weekly's* circulation in the state (approximately 2,500—sic! emphasis added!) initially but then additional copies were rushed and eventually the magazine sold over 10,000 copies." To Abdi's *suggestio falsi* is added Nandy's *suppressio veri*, the deliberate suppression of the truth. Confess it, Pritish—for the Truth Involves Us All.

When J B Patnaik did file his case, Nandy tried to bluff his way out of it. When he found that bluster would not ease him out of a jam, he came whining and whinnying to me. He pleaded that he had been out of India at the time the article had been published—and I must do something to save him from bankruptcy, prison and worse.

On his behalf, I called on J.B. Patnaik. I asked him whether a settlement out of court was possible. He agreed. He authorised me to work out with Nandy an acceptable form of words. Pritish and I spent long hours together in my house drafting different formulae, exploring the possibilities of an agreement that would not compromise Patnaik's honour without besmirching Pritish Nandy's. I carried these suggestions to Gopi Arora. He told me that the minimum requirement was the word "apology" or a synonym thereof. Nandy would not relent. Nor would Patnaik. The case continued.

Nandy describes this as "those terrible years of (Patnaik's) misrule while people like Mani Shankar Aiyar stood on the sidelines and cheered enthusiastically". Does Pritish never tell the truth? Did his mother never wash out his mouth with soap?

The cause of Nandy's umbrage is a purely private, purely personal telephone call I made to him. As Nandy tells it, "Aiyar called me yester-



S.N.M. Abdi summed up "Raju Jena's" tragic story in his own words and put it into Jena's mouth. This is revealed in the sentence introducing the quote, "The sum total of Jena's statement is"—not, as you can see, Jena's words but Abdi's

day and...mentioned how horrible Biju Patnaik is—before waxing eloquent on J.B. Patnaik's greatness. I laughed. What can one tell a silly man who shuts his eyes and then complains the world is black?"

Nandy is, of course, totally taken in by the "value-based politics" of the Janata Dal. He "shuts his eyes"—if I might borrow his eloquent phrase—to anything that might tarnish the silly man's image of V.P. Singh and his cohorts.

So, let me open his eyes. Nandy was in half-pants when, in 1967, Justice H.R. Khanna (yes, the same great jurist who resigned when he was passed over for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, then refused, on principle, to head the commission of inquiry against Indira Gandhi because it was she who had passed him over, and was later the Opposition's combined presidential candidate against Giani Zail Singh)—who headed a commission of inquiry against Biju Patnaik which concluded that five of the allegations

against Biju Patnaik "have been substantiated either wholly or in part...the charges proved would bring the case against Shri Patnaik within the ambit of the words 'committed various acts of improprieties and abuse of power'."

Is it wrong to bring to star-struck editors the truth about the kind of company that V.P. Singh keeps? I do not "complain" that the "world is black." I do complain about editors who are blackguards.

Pritish ends: "With advisers like Aiyar, does Rajiv Gandhi really need enemies?" I really don't know—for, after all, I am "a silly man". But with blackguards like Nandy, does V.P. Singh really need Biju Patnaik? •

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.



**T**he Sumeet Saigal-Shaheen affair is finally official. After numberless denials (of the we-are-only-good-friends variety) the pair have gone and got engaged, in a quiet ceremony attended only by a few close relatives.

Marriage may be in the offing, but Shaheen has no intentions of giving up on a career in films.

And no, her producers needn't press the panic button.

**N**othing, but nothing seems to stop Rupa Ganguly's progress in life. Her most recent acquisitions (soon after a trip to

(Krishna) Bharadwaj hasn't given up on Draupadi as yet.

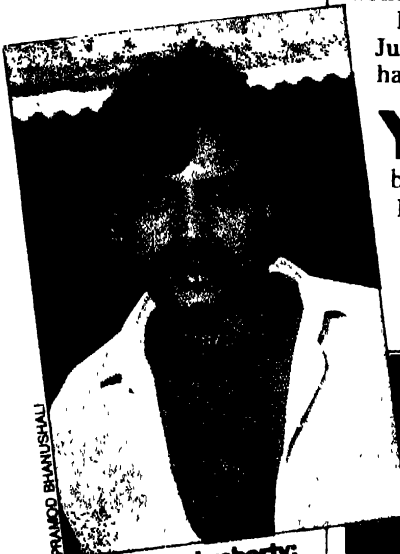
**I**f anything is increasing faster than Farha's waistline, it is her love for the occasional flirtation (with obliging lap dog Vindoo dropping out of sight while it lasts).

Her latest fancy: the young son of producer Raj Kumar Kohli.

But something tells us that the bovine beauty isn't going to meet with much success here. For, providing her strong competition for the handsome Mohnish's hand is none other than the nasal-voiced wonder Salma Agha.

Especially since Kohli Junior is reputed to have a thing for cat eyes.

**Y**ou're not going to believe this, but Anil Kapoor wasn't the first godfather the new bare-dare sensation, Shilpa Shirodkar, found in the industry.



**Mithun Chakraborty: homing in**

Dubai): a flat, an air-conditioned Maruti and a brand-new boyfriend. If you can stretch the point sufficiently to describe jaded stud Mithun Chakraborty thus.

Apparently, the two Bengali interlopers in Bombay's film world have joined hands and Mithun's car can be seen parked outside Rupa's apartment till late into the night.

Whether Chakraborty will manage to wangle permanent visiting rights remains in question: Nitish



**Farha: mirror, mirror on the wall...; (below) Rupa Ganguly: the going gets better all the while**

Evidently, long before the hirsute charmer appeared on the scene Mithun Chakraborty had staked his claim to the shapely Shirodkar, signing her on for his home production, a Hindi-Bengali bilingual. Unfortunately, the project never really took off, and Shilpa went on to better things—*Kishen Kanhaiya* and the (Anil) Kapoor camp.

Mithun, however, is (rather understandably) very bitter about the whole episode: "I've spent lakhs on Shilpa, but if she chooses to forget it there's nothing I can do."

Such outbursts notwithstanding, Shirodkar maintains her cool and the injured innocent act: "Please ask Mithun what's happening to that film."

And, contrary to popular opinion, the lines aren't dictated by Boney Kapoor. Or even by the dental-proud Rikku. ●



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NITIN RAI

## IT'S SHOWTIME, FOLKS!

Now that he's through with scouring the Andhra Pradesh countryside for cyclone victims whom he can lecture on Prime Minister V P. Singh's munificence ("look at the generous grants he has allocated to the

state"), N.T. Rama Rao has hit upon a new scheme to remain in the news

Recently, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo called on the Raja in New Delhi, accompanied by a high-powered

**Yash Chopra: all for a good cause**

**N.T. Rama Rao: keeping in the news**



SANTOSH GHOSH



delegation which included such names as G.P. Sippy, president of the Film Federation of India, Yash Chopra, producer-director and D.V.S. Raju, chairman of the National Film Development Corporation

The usual pleasantries done with, NTR disclosed his plan. He would, he informed the Raja, lead a team which organised cultural shows in seven major cities—Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. The proceeds of these programmes would go towards cyclone relief.

The PM had no hesitation in giving his blessings to the project.

Now, preparations for the first show, scheduled to be held this month in Delhi, are in full swing. The last such programme will be held in September (in Hyderabad) and a handsome cheque, made out to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, handed over to the Raja.

## HINDUSTAN KI KASAM

**Question:** what does an out-of-work politician do?

If he's Subramaniam Swamy he draws up programmes for "national renaissance".

The Janata Party working president recently circulated a seven-point agenda which, he claimed, would rejuvenate



**Subramaniam Swamy: the naming game**

ate the country if implemented.

First, India would have to be renamed Hindustan. Then, Sanskrit transformed into a live language (just as Hebrew had been revived by the Israelis) and Devnagari promoted as the common script.

Once these major tasks had been fulfilled, the government could get down to restructuring defence and foreign policies and abolishing the caste system.

Long live India  
...er...Hindustan!





## MOVE OVER, JHABVALA

Holidaying among the Karakoram ranges one summer, Pak-Anglian writer Bapsi Sidhwa was told an interesting story about a young girl married into one of the mountain tribes against her wishes. The teenager ran away, to seek refuge with her paramour. Without much success as it turned out, she was brought back to meet a very horrible death.

*The Bride*, Sidhwa's latest novel, was built around this incident. And now, Ismail Merchant is planning to base his next movie on Bapsi's book—once Anita Desai's *In Custody* is safely in the cans.

For Sidhwa, whose *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice Candy Man* were released to rave reviews, the Merchant venture marks an interesting



**Bapsi Sidhwa: something to crow about**

first: no work of her's has been filmed so far.

Merchant isn't the only celebrity involved in the project. Mallika-e-tarranum Nurjehan ("I haven't read *The Bride* but I



**Ismail Merchant: filming *The Bride***

have felt spiritually married to Merchant for years") will provide the music for the movie.

Sidhwa, however, (true to her modest self) isn't crowing about this coup either.

## PRESS ADVISOR JHA

He's been described as the best editor the *Economic Times* never had. And he's certainly proved the most mobile of business writers, changing jobs faster than V P Singh changes his mind. Now, appropriately enough, veteran journalist Prem Shankar Jha finds himself in the Raja's employ, serving time as the Prime Minister's press advisor.



**Prem Shankar Jha**

According to an official release, Jha will be designated additional secretary of the Government of India, and will occupy the post of press advisor for a two-year period.

Provided, of course, that the wander lust doesn't seize him again.

## BATTLE ROYAL

Before filing his nomination papers for the Jaipur Lok Sabha seat last year, Lt Col Bhawani (Bubbles) Singh visited his estranged stepmother, Gayatri Devi, to "seek her blessings". The Rajmata obliged by desisting from campaigning for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate. (The Maharaja lost the election nonetheless; but that is another story.)



**Lt Col Bhawani Singh and (above) Gayatri Devi: Palace Dallas**

But now, the temporary truce over, the members of the Jaipur royal family have joined battle again. The good Colonel

has filed a criminal complaint against his stepmother in connection with the activities of the Maharaja Sawai Jaisingh

Benevolent Trust

And Gayatri Devi, in a pre-emptive move, has applied for anticipatory bail.



# Tradition and

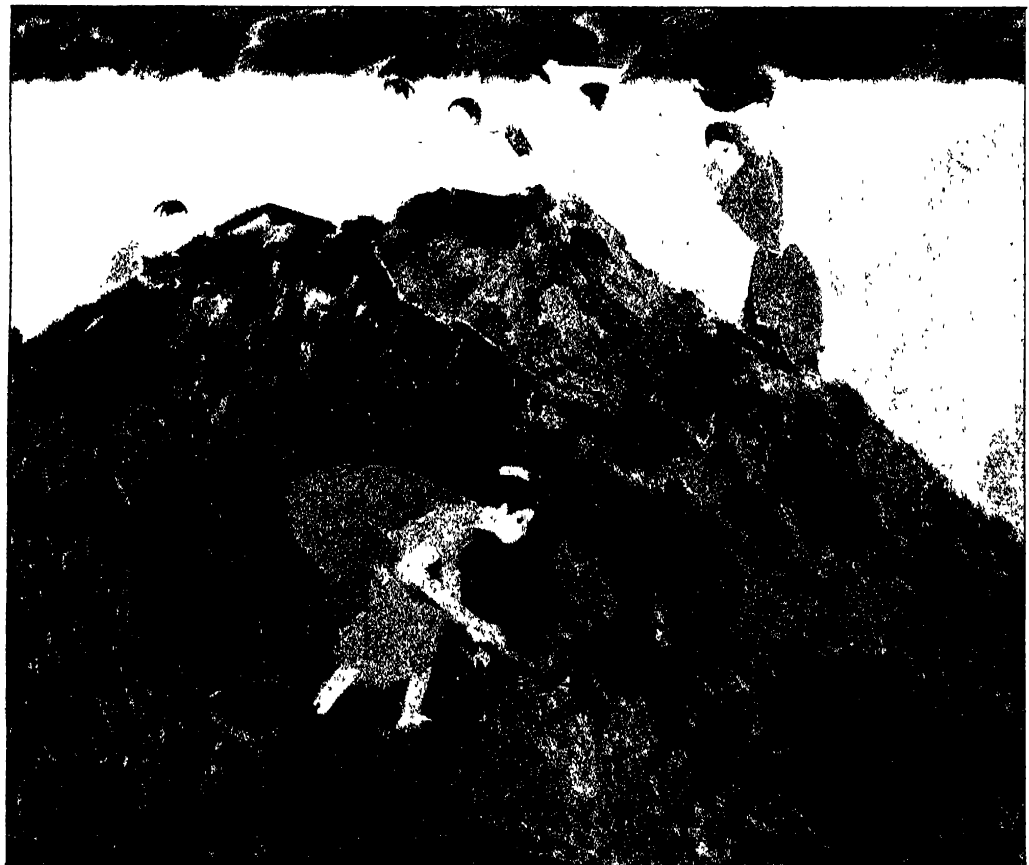
**O**n 14 August, 1947, in the hours approaching midnight, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru referred to India's "tryst with destiny", and feelingly spoke of the emergence of a new era. It is not difficult to surmise that at the momentous moment of history, Pandit Nehru had a vision of India in its full glory, blossoming in all aspects. He advocated the growth of a scientific temper, he also wished to see an advancement in the country's creative pursuits in the spheres of art and literature. Establishment of the three Akademies in New Delhi substantially illustrates the point. Opportunities and encouragement were offered to artists and writers to imbibe the spirit of the new era and to align their creativity to the existing situation. A consciousness of the challenge that confronted the nation was inculcated in them.

The Second World War had already shaken the conviction of those engaged in various creative disciplines. They became conscious of

their inadequacy to give expression to the contemporary situation and looked for inspiration and guidance from various sources in the East and the West, to develop an appropriate idiom. A search for contemporaneity had begun among the painters in some parts of India even before our independence. A concept of modernity was gradually taking shape.

**S**everal self-conscious modernists in different regions did some significant work to accelerate the process. Among the artists in Bombay the Progressive Artists' Group played a pioneering role. Seven like-minded painters and a sculptor, working in different manners, got together on one platform in search of a contemporary mode of expression. Their brand of modernity disowned tradition. They also turned their back on the academic art of the Royal Academy variety, which had been in vogue particularly among painters in Western India. The members of the group

*Art Mosaic In Celebration Of  
Calcutta's Tercentenary. Published  
by Purnima Productions. Distributed  
by Allied Publishers Ltd. Price: Rs  
250*



**N.S. BENDRE**  
Untitled. Oil



# modernity

*The Bombay art movement's search for contemporaneity*



**F.N. SOUZA**  
*Franciscan Monk. Oil*

(Below)  
**M.F. HUSAIN**  
*Untitled. Oil*



were Francis Newton Souza, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, K.H. Ara, V.S. Gaitonde, H.A. Gade and Bakre the bone sculptor. The manifesto of the group was drawn up by Souza, the only member with a flair for the written work. He borrowed the term 'Progressive' from communist organisations, with which he was associated. The manifesto did not elaborate upon a style or a doctrine, but dealt with the elements of form and colour in a manner which conformed to the international pattern, as known in the West. A Catholic, Souza gave expression to Christian subjects with a strength that invested his paintings with the quality of stained glass work. He did some outstanding work in the formative period of the group.

Husain, largely self-tutored, concerned





(From left)  
**K.K. HEBBAR**  
*Back to Nature. Oil*

**K.G. SUBRAMANIAM**  
*Goats in landscape. Water on board*



himself with the life around him, which he could identify himself with. Executed in lucid line and luminous colour, his canvases were marked by a distinct verve. In his choice of colours and directness of line he has always been a master par excellence. He occasionally combined qualities of tribal and folk traditions in his compositions, which were often two-dimensional.

S.H. Raza's chief concern was colour, which he used in his expressionist landscapes with gay abandon. He preferred to use pure colours to produce a vibrant atmospheric effect.

K.H. Ara, like Husain, was a self-taught painter, perhaps to a greater extent as Husain did attend the school of art at Indore for sometime; but Ara never went to any school. Painting was truly Ara's life, it was also his joy. His ability to make a still life live has rarely been matched by any artist. V.S. Gaitonde stood out conspicuously with his delicate abstracts, which he had arrived at via traditional exercises. His primary concern was colour which he used almost invariably in middle tones with fascinating textural effect.

H.A. Gade is another landscape painter who showed outstanding ability in the handling of sweeping colours in powerful pictorial structure.

Bakre too showed a good deal of sensitivity in the handling of creative sculpture. He did a few competent portraits too. He rarely finds a mention in an account of the Progressive Group, as his career as a sculptor virtually ended in an aesthetic misadventure after he went to England.

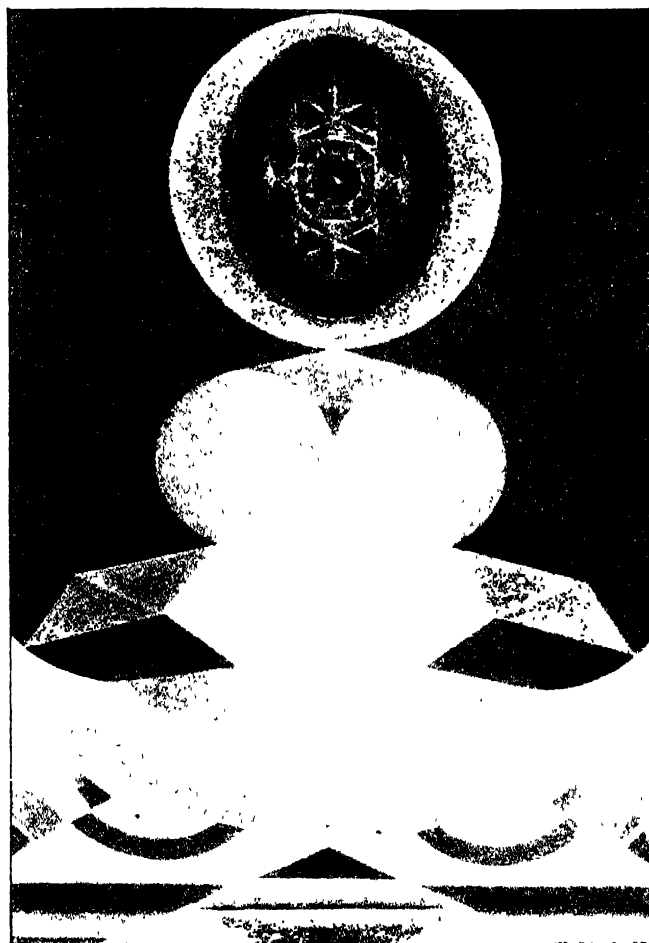
On the whole the painters in the Progressive Artists' Group stood on their creative ability and at times evinced distinct eclectic traits. They surely succeeded in laying the foundation of a modern idiom of pictorial expression, although each one of them worked on his own. The group gradually disintegrated after Souza and Raza went abroad and settled down in England and France respectively. Souza later shifted to New York. Husain gradually became a wandering minstrel, visiting Bombay only once in a while.

In the art life of Bombay, the Jehangir Art Gallery provided a strong base for art activity in the city after its establishment in 1951. Till then the most important centre was Sir J.J. School of Art, the alma mater for almost all practising artists in the city, with the exception of a few self-taught artists like Husain or Ara. Painters like Hebbbar, Chavda, Satwalekar, Palsikar, Laxman Pai or Baburao Sadwelkar, who had already made their mark

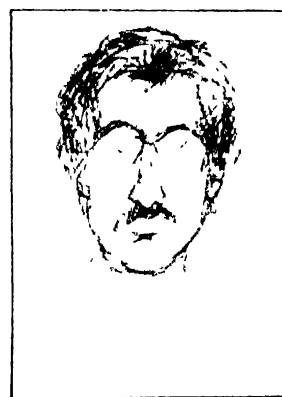
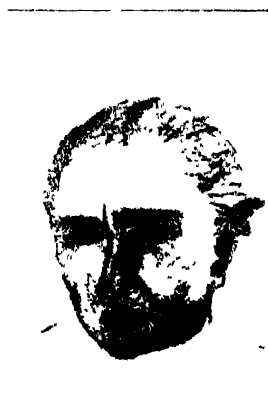




**AKBAR PADAMSEE**  
Untitled. Water colour



**GULAM RASOOL  
SANTOSH**  
Untitled. Oil



in the contemporary art life of Bombay outside the Progressive Group were all products of school. The other important rendezvous in the art world was the Bombay Art Society's Salon, which closed down once the Society moved to Jehangir Art Gallery.

In 1953 some of the artists in Bombay felt the need of another group of practising artists to maintain a continuity of the Progressive Group. In 1953 a new group came into being with those members of the Progressive Group who were still in India and a few others like Hebbbar, Chavda, Mohan Samant, Har Krishan Lal, Laxman Pai and Baburao Sad-

welkar. They called themselves the Bombay Group. But it never made a mark as a group, because of the heterogeneity of its members, its disintegration was as unnoticed as was its formation.

The art movement in Bombay continued in multi-dimensional fashion. K K Hebbbar dealt with a variety of subjects, drawn mainly from everyday life and aspects of natural phenomena with a distinct flavour of national identity. He was awarded the coveted Gold Medal of the Bombay Art Society in 1947, which was then considered to be the most prestigious award for a painter in India.





**HEMA JOSHI**  
Untitled. Water colour



**SURUCHI CHAND**  
Untitled. Oil

While numerous Bombay painters were experimenting in techniques employed by leading artists in the West, in order to evolve a contemporary mode of expression, a young group stood apart and produced some outstanding work in traditional Indian style. The leader of this band of young artists was S B Palsikar. This group included among others—Gaitonde, Mohan Samant, A A. Raiba and Almelkar—all products of Sir J J. School of Art. They strove to achieve contemporaneity on the basis of Indian tradition, which was anathema to several of their compatriots. They persevered not merely in search of their roots but their application on a pictorial expression in step with the changing ideas of the age. The results were fascinating. Most of them had the distinction of winning the Gold Medal of Bombay Art Society—Palsikar in 1949, Almelkar in 1953, Raiba in 1955 and Samant in 1956. The sum total of their contribution to the emerging contemporary movement was not insignificant.

Mention has to be made also of Akbar Padamsee and Tyeb Mehta. Akbar belongs to the group of young rebels who had challenged the academic trend of the Forties. Keenly conscious of the grassroots of creativity, he has made a study of and imbibed the fundamentals of aesthetics which emboldens him to march ahead with conviction. Tyeb honours the modernist predilection and has chalked out his own path on eclectic lines to depict tortured humans. He makes use of it with a finesse all his own. I would also like to mention Bal Chhabda, a non-professional

professional painter with a professional approach. He enjoys painting as is evident from his canvases which speak in an abstract idiom.

I must make a mention of a few women artists too who have made their mark for their ingenuity in evolving distinctive modes of expression. Nalini Malani, Meera Devidayal, Suruchi Chand and Hema Joshi among them, have been working consistently and have exhibited their work regularly over the years, in Bombay and other art centres in India and abroad.

Before I close my account of Bombay artists I must mention Badri Narain. He stands alone, but firmly in a distinctive sphere of his choice. He has steered clear of the conflicts that ail our contemporary movement and has chosen the path of fantasy

and day dreams.

In the Sixties a major section of the contemporary art movement in Western India shifted to Baroda with the establishment of the Faculty of Fine Art in the M S University. The Faculty turned out a large number of young artists who were trained under the enlightened guidance of N S Bendre and Sankho Chaudhury. Bendre was successful in inculcating in them a spirit of modernity through his own experimentations in many a painterly "ism" prevalent in the West and so did Sankho in the sphere of sculpture. K.G. Subramanyam also provided an enlightened leadership in the growth of contemporary consciousness. Several of their disciples spread to various parts of India and some continued in the faculty. Ratan Parimoo, Joram Patel, Nasreen Mohammedi, Mahendra Pandya, Jyoti Bhatt and Ghulam Sheikh continue to impart to their students new idioms in painting, printmaking and sculpture.

Among those who left Baroda after their training are G.R. Santosh, Shanti Dave and Laxma Goud.

A galaxy of artists have worked in Western India, in the post-Independence period, in diverse techniques and styles. Their common objective has been to evolve a language appropriate for the presentation of contemporary sensibility. The ideas of people, however, is changing constantly—the pictorial language too has to keep up with it. •

**Ram Chatterji/Bombay**



# Why the IPKF failed

*Kadian provides an engaging account of India's Sri Lankan fiasco*

**A**s a record of the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF's) unhappy experiences in Sri Lanka, Rajesh Kadian's recent book is a stimulating read. *India's Sri Lanka Fiasco* is an engaging account, full of interesting details and insights, of the IPKF's offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—beginning with Operation Pawan in late 1987 and ending with the withdrawal this March.

Kadian is clearly well-versed in military matters. He is at his best when explaining—often critically—the strategy employed by the army's top brass in what was largely a guerrilla war. There is a marvellous chapter on the battle for Jaffna ("Was the number of men the army employed for the operation too small?", "Were intelligence estimates of the LTTE's strength far off the mark?", "Did the force really have to lose some 300 men to take the city?") and intelligently written descriptions of the army's attempt to cage the Tigers in the jungles of northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

If the book has its weak (even bland) parts, it is because Kadian hasn't been able to resist the temptation of making it more than a military account—of also wanting to play the historian and political analyst. It is here that *India's Sri Lanka Fiasco* reads pretty much like any of those innumerable popular accounts of the island's so-called ethnic crisis.

Kadian devotes some sections to a potted history of Sri Lanka—the origins of the Tamil and Sinhala races, the wars between their kingdoms and the years of colonisation under the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British. He also traces the politics of the island after Independence: the growth of Tamil nationalism, the progressive Sinhala domination and

the gradual alienation of the former community from the national mainstream.

While "a politico-historical perspective" may be essential to understanding the turbulent years that followed the signing of the India-Sri Lanka accord, its place in Kadian's book is, nevertheless, questionable. For one, Kadian's political history is much too sketchy and serves to intrude on his main concern (the IPKF fiasco) rather

devoted to matters on which he is comfortable and fluent.

Although some may think Kadian is too soft on the IPKF (there is little or nothing on the indiscriminate killing of civilians in Valvettithurai and elsewhere, its complicity in the forcible conscription of young men by militant groups opposed to the LTTE and numerous allegations of torture and ill-treatment), the book has a right-minded attitude about it.



**Rajesh Kadian is at his best when explaining the strategy employed by the army's top brass in what was largely a guerrilla war**

than nourish it. For another, it relies wholly on secondary sources (unlike his descriptions of the army operations which have largely been pieced together from oral accounts).

But to be fair to Kadian, the "perspective-lending" sections are mercifully brief and the bulk of his book is

Kadian is harsh on the India-Sri Lanka accord, which he correctly thinks was a farce as it did not have the support of the various Tamil groups. And despite implying sometimes—if only unwittingly—that the battle would have taken another course had the army employed different tactics ("Was the SLR 7.62 mm an inappropriate weapon for close combat situations?", "Were the VM series of radio sets not powerful enough for use in built up areas?", "Why were sufficient quantities of nickel cadmium batteries not made available?"), Kadian really believes that this was an unwinnable

war. One that was foisted on the army by a short sighted and unduly optimistic political establishment.

The author says that the Sri Lankan experience has underlined the need to understand "why accords fail" and re-define "India's national security and geostrategic perspectives". To an extent, Kadian himself has attempted to do just this in his book. But his real contribution has been to provide what is perhaps the first complete, intelligent and detailed account of the IPKF's military adventure in Sri Lanka. And in a manner that is almost always spirited and engaging. •

**Mukund Padmanabhan**

*India's Sri Lanka Fiasco* by Rajesh Kadian. Published by Vision Books.



# Victory, at last!

*Om Prakash Chautala wins at Darba Kalan, but not all Janata Dal leaders are happy*



HARYANA

In one sense it was an ordinary by-election to an Assembly seat. In another sense it was crucial for the equation between the Titans of the Janata Dal depended on its outcome. So on 26 May, all eyes were focussed on the Darba Kalan Assembly constituency in Haryana, from where Om Prakash Chautala, the former chief minister and the eldest son of the Jat supremo, Deputy Prime Minister Chaudhary Devi Lal, was seeking election to the state Assembly.

For Chautala, it was a question of his political survival. As for Devi Lal, his credibility was at stake. After Devi Lal relinquished the chief ministership of Haryana to become the Deputy Prime Minister, Chautala was nominated by the state Janata Dal legislature party as the chief minister. But he was not an M.L.A. then and was constitutionally bound to become one within six months. He first tried doing so in Meham, in February, but the election was countermanded because of brutal and mindless violence. Fresh elections were announced in Meham and also in Darba Kalan on 26 May and Chautala decided to contest from both. But polling in Meham was countermanded for the second time following the murder of Anni Singh, an Independent candidate, and Chautala had to resign from chief ministership in the face of a

national outcry.

Fortunately for Chautala, he had the Darba Kalan constituency to demonstrate his popularity when most people accused him of having engineered the Meham violence. For Devi Lal too, it was a crucial test. He had been doggedly defending his son against a barrage of criticism over the Meham incidents, and Darba Kalan was one place where he could vindicate his stand. If Chautala won, Devi Lal could tell Prime Minister V.P. Singh—who had sided with Chautala's critics—that his boy wasn't

the devil he was being made out to be.

And eventually Chautala did win by a huge margin of 54,000 votes—the second largest margin in any by-election in the state. All the other nine candidates, including the Congress(I) candidate, Jagdish Nehra, had to forfeit their deposits. The voting pattern showed that Chautala still enjoyed a strong base in the state. Over 70 per cent of the voters had exercised their franchise. It was a convincing victory for Chautala, and he had expected it. The former chief minister had not even bothered to appoint an election agent for the crucial poll.

The government had taken no chances this time and made an unprecedented security arrangement for the Darba Kalan poll. Thirty-six companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) had been deployed and, for the first time, the deputy election commissioner was himself present in the constituency to ensure that a Meham-type situation was not repeated. The stakes in this by-election were clearly too high.

Fortunately, the polling was peaceful. The only moment of anxiety for the large police force was when Jagdish Nehra approached the election commissioner with a letter, in which he alleged that an Independent candidate, Santokh Singh, had been murdered. But on the following day, Singh was traced by the police and the constituency heaved a sigh of relief.

The Darba Kalan results came as a severe

Om Prakash Chautala: still popular



N. N. RAJ





**Banarsi Das Gupta: suits the Dal better**

blow to the critics of Chautala and Devi Lal within the Janata Dal, who had only days ago taken the difficult decision to ask Chautala to step down. The first to comment on the results was Devi Lal. He told reporters in Delhi with undisguised glee, "He (Chautala) will win from Meham also with a thumping majority." Chautala himself, in a subdued gesture, circulated a press release in which he claimed he was elected despite the smear-campaign in newspapers which had said that he had committed a murder of democracy in Meham.

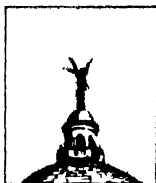
What would Chautala do now? There is no doubt that because of the strange power Chautala wields over his father, the party would have no option but to rehabilitate him sooner or later. But would V P. Singh take the unpopular decision of making Chautala the chief minister again?

In all probability, not. Having a non-Jat chief minister in Banarsi Das Gupta suits the Janata Dal. Also, though there were growing apprehensions that Devi Lal would try and bring his son to Parliament and later insist on a berth for him in the Cabinet, this did not seem an immediate possibility. It is also unlikely that Chautala would now risk standing in the Meham by-election, due in three months' time. The most likely development arising out of Devi Lal's pressure tactics is the nomination of Chautala to a party position as a compromise for the humiliation he suffered after Meham. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi.**

## Not a clean sweep

*The Congress(I) gains even as the LF emerges on top in the municipal polls*



**WEST BENGAL**

When the state's 74 municipalities went to the polls on 27 May, a Marxist sweep was probably inevitable. Since 1977, almost every election (whether to the Lok Sabha or to a local body) has produced a comfortable Left Front victory. Only this win was different. Amidst the chorus of self-congratulations, came the murmurs of disquiet. True, the Left Front was the clear-cut victor, with sweeping wins in 50 towns. But unseemly squabbles within the Front, persistent reports of rigging and the dogged comeback of the Congress(I) dimmed the

the Left Front have won an equal number of wards. "We have done better this time even though our supporters weren't allowed to vote in many places," said the ebullient Congress(I) state general secretary, Pradip Bhattacharya, who shrilly complained about electoral atrocities by the communists in the state.

Major morale boosters for the Congress(I) are the sweeps at Budge Budge and Behrampore. Budge Budge, on the outskirts of Calcutta, was a CPI(M) stronghold. At Behrampore, Sankardas Pal, Congress(I) chairman of the municipality, had the last laugh. Late last year, state urban development and local government minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya su-



**Security forces patrolling in Kankinara: memories of Meham**

### Front's allure

While state transport minister Shyamal Chakraborty thanked the people for another "overwhelming victory," Congress(I) leaders quietly, but perhaps prematurely, acknowledged that they had fought their way out of the darkness. Wrestling seven municipalities from the Left Front, the Congress(I) now controls 16 towns, six more than the previous total. Independents hold the key in Naihati, Dhulian, Birnagar and Jagannj-Azimganj, while the toss of a coin will decide the fate of four others (Baidyabati, Daihat, Bolpur and Mathabhanga) as the Congress(I) and

perseded (read dissolved) the municipality for financial improprieties, though the High Court later reversed the decision. "The people of Behrampore have taught Buddhadev Bhattacharya a lesson for insulting them," Pal remarked, while Congress(I) leaders called for the minister's resignation.

Minor mishaps apart, the Left Front remains in control, winning over 700 wards (including 580 by the CPI-M) to the Congress(I)'s 416. In the districts of Hooghly, Burdwan and North 24 Parganas, the CPI(M) steamrolled all opposition, winning all 19 wards in



Barrackpore, 11 of the 15 in coal rich Raniganj, 11 of 16 in Bhadreswar and 14 out of 29 in the former Dutch colony of Chinsurah.

Even in victory, dissension plagued the Left Front. From his comfortable perch in Writers' Buildings, state agriculture minister Kamal Guha of the Forward Bloc (one of the four major Left Front constituents) accused the CPI(M) of joining hands with the Congress(I) to defeat Forward Bloc candidates in Cooch Behar district of north Bengal. "The Congress(I) and the CPI(M) definitely had a joint plan of action in wards 6, 7 and 8 of the Dinhata municipality," he regretted. In Dhulian, Forward Bloc candidates contested against CPI(M) men, while in Beldanga, the CPI(M)-supported Nagarik Committee fought the RSP. Even in Murshidabad, CPI and Forward Bloc leaders suspect that the CPI(M) campaigned against them.

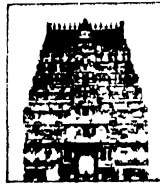
If the Congress(I) asked for Buddhadev Bhattacharya's resignation, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) demanded chief minister Jyoti Basu's scalp for creating a "Meham-like situation in West Bengal." While policemen turned a Nelson's eye, complacent officials and CPI(M) toughs turned out polling agents, stuffed ballot boxes and beat up Congress(I) workers. In Baranagore, and Bhatpara, and in Nabhati and Kanchrapara, all industrial townships close to Calcutta, red terror prevailed for several hours. But such rough-stuff was clearly a case of over-kill: the Left Front would have won in any case.

Not only do the Left Front leaders deny the existence of their "action squads", they even deny that Congressmen and their toughs fought pitched battles in some places. "The charges by the Congress(I) are baseless," claimed state health minister Prasanta Sur. If the Left Front is exultant and the Congress(I) can now dare to hope, the BJP, apart from the heated Meham-in-Bengal rhetoric, quietly accepted complete defeat. Of its 800-odd candidates, an inconsequential few were successful. More important than any municipality is the Calcutta Corporation elections on June 17. In the 1985 polls, the Left Front had won by a hair's breadth. This time too, the Left Front remains a step ahead, but the Congress(I), revitalized by the recent results is now hoping for an upset victory. •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Calcutta**

## Memories of MGR

*A memorial to the former chief minister is inaugurated in Madras amidst controversy*



TAMIL NADU

On 17 May, a gigantic memorial was inaugurated in Madras by Janaki Ramachandran. Its sprawling rooms display an incredible number of articles wrapped in memories of the former AIADMK chief minister, M G Ramachandran. The tur cap, the dark glasses, the Seiko sports timer with its very broad band— all of MGR's trademarks are on show. One even

comes across a stuffed lion in the first floor hall, the preserved remains of the film-star-turned-politician's pet. Among the expensive items is a silver tree with a solid gold mango hanging from a branch, symbolising *ulhavakani*—meaning a heart-like fruit, a name conferred on MGR by AIADMK founder C N Annadurai. And one cannot miss the aquamarine Ambassador that MGR used. There are various letters on display too, from dignitaries in varied fields. Among them are letters of former friend and later arch-rival-turned-enemy, Karunanidhi.

The inauguration of MGR's memorial brought to an end months of suspense over the proper execution of the late leader's will. Naming N C Raghavachari, lawyer and long time friend, as the executor of his will, MGR had left detailed instructions for setting up this memorial. But Raghavachari had not been too successful with an uncooperative Janaki showing no desire to part with the various articles, some very expensive. Finally, Raghavachari bowed out after handing over the charge to M Rajendran, a close relative of Janaki. Work began last year, with Janaki sanctioning Rs



Janaki : a dream come true

## Cadre raj

*BJP workers come to rule Madhya Pradesh*

**W**ho runs Madhya Pradesh? Well, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), of course. But there is more to it than meets the eye, for chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa is insisting that government officials take their orders from BJP workers.

This came to light in a recent controversy involving chief minister Patwa, home minister Shitla Sahay and the state's director general of police (DGP), P.D. Malviya.

The controversy centres on the posting of three town inspectors of Indore police. They were

transferred from the city last year after they were accused of having acted in a partisan manner during a communal riot. With the change of government in the state, the three policemen, with the help of some BJP MLAs, brought pressure on Sahay and Patwa to get posted back in Indore. But DGP Malviya has refused to budge, despite requests from Patwa. He has stuck to his point that no such transfer could be allowed until an enquiry into the conduct of the three cops was complete.

This intransigence of the DGP so irked the chief minister that he



four lakhs for the project, and culminated in the dramatic opening last month

The drama mainly consisted of intra-party politicking. For one, Janaki follower Paul Hector Pandiyan was heckled by Jayalalitha loyalists till the police escorted him to safety. In another incident, former ministers and Jayalalitha followers S. Thirunavukarasu, R. M. Veerappan and S. Muthuswamy were present in the ceremony. Later AIADMK senior joint general secretary S. D. Somasundaram and the party headquarters secretary C. Aranganayagam—both staunch Jayalalitha faithfuls—took up the matter and wanted to know why the three had flocked to the memorial and posed for snapshots with Janaki without taking the permission of party general secretary Jayalalitha. This is pretty ridiculous, according to other AIADMK members, since it is impossible to get in touch with Jayalalitha anyway.

Petty politics apart, the memorial itself is quite a crowd-puller. All the fond memories that DMK supremo M. Karunanidhi would love to erase, have once again flooded the masses. "We feel his presence," says Marimuthu, a farmer. "After this," chips in his wife Mookamma, "we are going to his *samadhi*. It is like visiting a temple—he had been so good to us, the poor." Looks like Karunanidhi will have a tough time fighting this resurgence of MGR's popularity. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**

announced in a meeting of senior police officers in Bhopal that all government officials, particularly those posted in the districts, would have to work on the basis of guidelines provided to them by BJP workers.

This attempt on Patwa's part to make the administration subservient to his partymen and introduce a cadre *raj* has been deeply resented by the state police. Said a senior officer: "If the government wants us to work on the advice of the BJP workers and if this is going to be the criterion for judging the competence of a police official, then there is hardly any difference between the previous Congress(I) regime and the present government." •

**M.V. Kher/Raipur**

## Teething troubles

*BJP MPs are unhappy with chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa's way of functioning*



MADHYA  
PRADESH

If power fails to corrupt, it certainly spawns dissidence. Chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa has realised this of late, as several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs have started lobbying against him with the party's national leadership in Delhi. The MPs, led by the irrepressible Dilip Kumar Joodev, have complained against Patwa's style of functioning and have requested the national leadership to take remedial measures.

That the BJP high command took the complaint seriously is evident from the fact that it advised Patwa to begin a dialogue with the disaffected MPs. The best way to do this was, of course, over food. So, Pyarelal Khandelwal, MP and general secretary of the state BJP, hosted a dinner which was attended by Patwa and most MPs from the state.

According to BJP insiders, the leaders exchanged views freely, without making any effort to hide their differences. The MPs told the chief minister clearly that they were finding it embarrassing to visit their constituencies as the government had failed to wipe off farm loans, which was one of the important promises the party had made before the elections.

Joodev is also sore over the fact that the Centre has turned down the state's proposal of setting up a coal-based fertiliser plant at Korba. The MP had declared that he would get the project cleared if the BJP was elected to power, but Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal announced in Parliament recently that the project had been abandoned.

Much to Patwa's embarrassment, the BJP MPs are now demanding that

they should be nominated as chairmen of the district development boards (DDB). This policy was followed by the former Congress(I) chief minister, Motilal Vora, who authorised MPs—as chairmen of the DDBs—to sanction money up to rupees one crore for developmental work. As an Opposition leader at that time Patwa was critical about this policy, but is now under pressure from his own party colleagues to adopt a policy that he had once denounced.

The talk of the dissidence is no longer confined to the party but has become a topic of discussion in the local press and political circles. The man who is likely to gain the most out of these inner-party differences is former chief minister Kailash Joshi, who was a contender for the chief ministership. Joshi has refused to accept



**Sunder Lal Patwa: unsavoury feedback**

senior ministerial posts in the Patwa Cabinet despite much persuasion by the chief minister himself and the party high command. And now that the pitch seems to be queering for Patwa, Joshi is expected to step up his activities and emerge from the shadows. •

**M.V. Kher/Raipur**



# Demolition drama

*The action of a government official stuns the state Cabinet*



GOA

They rammed lorries into the walls of a house to bring it down. And it was a real house—of brick and mortar—and not a plywood structure on the sets of a Bombay film studio. The demolition work began at 9.30 am on 12 May. By 1.20 pm the house was razed to the ground.

The incident has stirred a hornet's nest in state capital Panaji as ministers and other political bigwigs failed to restrain a young IAS officer from going ahead with the job. Vijay Dev,

the matter. Dev, apparently, had not issued any show-cause notice to Antao before he began battering down the house.

By 10.30 am, the paper contacted P.V. Jayakrishna, the chief secretary of the state, and the deputy chief minister, Ramakant Khalap, requesting them to restrain Dev. According to sources, Khalap sent a wireless message to Dev through Vasco police station, asking him to stop the demolition work. And if Antao is to be believed, the message reached Dev at 12.30 pm. But the demolition continued regardless. According to Dev, however, he received Khalap's in-

Obviously, Dev's action smacks of vengeance and vendetta. The story dates back to 19 March, when Antao filed a report in the *Gomantak Times* on the demolition of a mosque in Zuarinagar by Dev despite a 'no objection certificate' having been issued by the local *panchayat* regarding its construction. On 22 March, Antao followed up his story with another report on the reactions of the local Muslims who were "set to hold *namaz* in front of the collectorate".

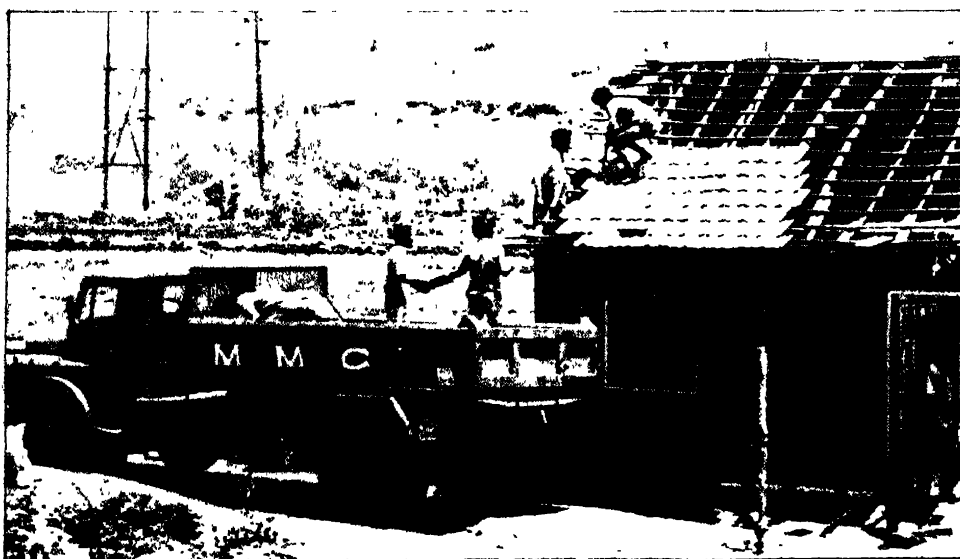
Antao thus incurred Dev's wrath. On the very next day, Dev tried to demolish Antao's house, but failed as the newsman succeeded in producing some valid documents. In frustration, Dev carried away a few tiles and swore to "teach him (Antao) a lesson".

Antao retaliated by filing a complaint with the police, accusing Dev of criminal trespass and dacoity. On 27 March, Dev sent feelers to Antao through the *sarpanch* of Chicalim, stating that he was ready to

resolve the dispute, if Antao withdrew the complaint he had lodged with the police.

To make peace, Antao agreed to Dev's terms, but the latter went on to make fresh demands after Antao withdrew the complaint. Dev now wanted Antao to issue an apology in the form of a newspaper advertisement for filing the story on the demolition of the mosque. At this point, Antao decided that enough was enough. He hit back by making public a tape-recorded conversation to prove that Dev was trying to extract an apology from him.

Since then Antao passed through a harrowing time. No less than nine attempts were made by Dev to demolish Antao's house, but he failed on every occasion. Realising that Dev was being vindictive, Antao approached chief minister L.P. Barbosa, deputy chief minister R.D. Khalap, revenue minister Kashinath Jhalami and tourism minister Churchill Alemao for protection. The four leaders directed Dev to desist from making further attempts to demolish Antao's house. Moreover, on 11 May Antao moved an application under Section 192 of the Land Revenue Code before



Tiles being removed from Antao's house: personal vendetta

deputy collector of Mormugao, in south Goa, who conducted the operation refused to budge despite having been ordered by the government to stop.

The house, located in an area known for its illegal constructions, belonged to Edmund Antao, a *Gomantak Times* correspondent based at Alto Dabolim, in Vasco. The owners of the house were away when Dev arrived with his army of demolishers and got down to work. But as soon as Antao learnt about Dev's mission, he contacted the *Gomantak Times* head office and informed the paper about

struction only after the house had been razed to the ground.

Ironically, 70 per cent of the people in the area, who belong to the working class, live in illegally constructed houses. The problem has arisen because of an acute shortage of housing at affordable prices in the port town of Vasco. The authorities have, therefore, been legalising the structures by levying house tax as long as the occupants have valid ration cards, power connections and can prove that their names figure in the voters' list. Why, then, was Antao's house singled out for demolition?



Jhalmi, in which he appealed to the minister to call for all records of the proceedings against his house. But on 12 May, the house was demolished.

Dev's action sparked off a row in the state Cabinet. The four ministers, including chief minister Barbosa, wondered what gave Dev the courage to disregard their instructions. Jhalmi accused industries minister Mauvin Godinho of supporting Dev, and a war of words began between Godinho and Khalap when the latter suggested that Dev be suspended.

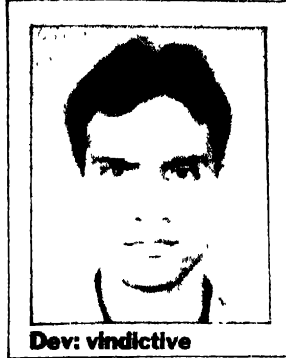
Dev, however, defends his move unwaveringly. "I was fully aware of the consequences, but I demolished the house because it was illegal. The government must allow me to work as per the law," says Dev. "The owner neither had the land conversion certificate nor the title of the land."

But Ferdino Rebello, chief of the Citizens for Democracy, a civil rights organisation, accuses Dev of having violated the very law he is trying to uphold. "For every demolition a show-cause notice has to be served. But this was not done in this case. And if the land conversion certificate was not available, the maximum

punishment in such a case could only be a fine," says an indignant Rebello. "Besides," he adds, "the house has a *panchayat* house number and electricity connection. The demolition is illegal."

Political analysts suspect that the operation was masterminded by a section of the state's IAS officers in order to cause a rift within the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF). Soon after it came to power, the PDF announced that all top posts in the state would be filled up by Goan officers, while those from other parts of India would be transferred. This policy decision has irked the non-Goan officialdom and it is trying to drive a wedge between the PDF leaders so as to render them ineffective.

On the day before the demolition was carried out, a meeting was held between chief secretary Jayakrishnan, the collector of south Goa, Jose Philip, and Dev, in which the decision to demolish Antao's house was



**Dev: vindictive**

taken. Now, after a row in the state Cabinet, Dev has been transferred from south Goa and an enquiry has been ordered into the case. But, curiously, it is Jayakrishnan who has been asked to carry out the probe. "The chief secretary had been inseparably linked to the issue till the last moment. How can such a person

conduct a fair enquiry?" asks Antao.

Meanwhile, the journalist remains homeless. His friends and colleagues have decided to raise funds so that he could rebuild the house. But in view of the approaching monsoon, the state government has decided to provide Antao with an alternative accommodation on humanitarian grounds.

But Antao is unlikely to be placated by this show of benevolence. He has threatened to go to the Supreme Court if he fails to get justice and is not adequately compensated. And if he does, it could mean the beginning of a long battle. •

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# To market, to market

*Once Vishva Bharati's copyright on Tagore lapses, private publishers could be on to a bonanza*

**T**he countdown has begun to January, 1992, when Vishva Bharati's copyright to Rabindranath Tagore's works will lapse. Fifty years after the Nobel Laureate's death, his works are up for grabs. And the publishing world ready to pounce.

Not surprisingly, Vishva Bharati—the university founded by Tagore in Santiniketan—is reluctant to let go of its prize possession. Hoping for a change in the laws, it recently appealed to chief minister Jyoti Basu, to get the copyright extended by another 50 years. The subject was brought up in Parliament too, but India, a signatory of the Berne Convention, is bound by international codes and the possibility of making an exception in this case seems remote.

Vishva Bharati has a point. Indiscriminate publication of Tagore's works would flood the market with ill-edited, even distorted, versions of the poet's works, it fears, harming his image and that of Bengali culture as a whole. "As it is, the number of Tagore scholars competent enough to edit his works is limited," says Nimai Sadhan Bose, ex-vice-chancellor, Vishva Bharati. "It wasn't easy for Vishva Bharati either, but long experience and expertise makes it more competent than most."

Although Vishva Bharati makes much of the fact that their versions of Tagore's works are the only authentic ones, it might have a vested interest in keeping the copyright going. In a competitive market, the university will have to lower its cost of production drastically, and some retrenchment seems inevitable.

What works against the university is that its publications, however authentic, are frequently unavailable. It only provides a select few translations in some regional languages and English, while Tagore's collected works are only available in the original Bengali. (The collection has been translated into Japanese by foreign scholars, though the work is not easily available in India, and work on the Russian edition is in progress.)

What makes the situation even more interesting is that a number of

Tagore's original works are unpublished as yet. After the death of Pulin Behari Sen, the editor and central pillar of Tagore's research, in 1984, only one volume of Tagore's letters have been published. Many of the letters as well as lectures and socio-political essays, have not appeared in print as yet. Besides, Tagore's works have hitherto been edited with righteous loyalty to the demi-god, an attitude which academically, may have outlived its usefulness. If private pub-



**Rabindranath Tagore: Vishva Bharati's prize possession**

lishers enter the field, they are bound to rewrite the rules.

Small wonder then, that Vishva Bharati wants to cling on to its monopoly. "There is no need to panic," grins Badal Basu, head of Ananda Publishers, the leading Bengali publishing house. "People go in for the original editions anyway. Besides, if authors like Shakespeare have survived the free market, Rabindranath will too. And a lot can be

achieved with efficiently edited imaginative productions. "Most publishers will go in for better production of already published works," says Sudhangshu Shekher Dey, of Dey's Publishing. "So, the editing won't be a problem." Interestingly, even private enterprises seem to believe that only Vishva Bharati has access to competent Tagore scholars.

Voicing his doubts, Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury VC, Calcutta University, says, "It depends on one's commitment to the original. However, since there are various legalities involved, trying to extend the copyright might be a losing battle. And Vishva Bharati seems to be aware of this. 'Parliament will decide', says a resigned Ashim Dasgupta, the newly appointed VC of Vishva Bharati.

But the hue and cry over the copyright expiry might not be entirely justified. "All this is unnecessary," points out Shankha Ghosh, till recently director of the Tagore archives, Rabindra Bhavan. "Vishva Bharati will have to continue its academic pursuits—its responsibilities are in no way affected by the expiry of the copyright."

Among the responsibilities, however, is the control Vishva Bharati wields over Tagore's songs. The sanctity of *Rabindrasangeet* is guarded closely, sometimes to the utter frustration of the artists. The end of the copyright will guarantee them total freedom of artistic expression. And with a many-sided genius like Tagore, whose poetry, fiction, essays, songs, drama and paintings envelope Bengali life even today, this could be a danger as well as a welcome change. Tagore could be rediscovered on a national and international level through different media. Like Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, Broadway's *Cats*—a re-interpretation of the T.S. Eliot poem-sequence—or Prokofiev's setting *Romeo and Juliet* to music, now Tagore, too, might break free of orthodox interpretations and acquire a new dimension through creative critiques. •

**Antara Dev Sen**



DINESH MOHAN

# Our fragile biosphere

*The government should enforce strict standards to safeguard it*

**R**ecently two conferences were held in Delhi. One on wasteland development for a sustainable future and another on consumer and environmental laws. Both the conferences were inaugurated by Maneka Gandhi, minister of state for environment and forests. I can't remember any conference where a minister has been as frank, straightforward and concerned as Maneka Gandhi was at these two conferences. She clearly understands the weaknesses of our system in dealing with issues concerning environmental and consumer protection. Her speeches also made it clear that it is not always easy going for her as far as dealing with bureaucrats and other political leaders is concerned.

The situation prevalent in our country as far as the environment is concerned is alarming. In cities pollution is increasing and in rural areas the tree cover declining. The forest cover is down to about 14 per cent of the total area of India. Various estimates put the percentage of "degraded" land at 30 to 60 per cent.

Our large cities face a serious problem as the synergistic effect of dust combined with industrial and vehicle pollutants can be almost lethal for people with respiratory problems. It has been very difficult to control industry and, to make it worse, past governments have encouraged the use of two-wheelers and cars rather than public transport. Two-stroke engines, which are used in motorcycles and scooters, are the worst pollutants because they have incomplete combustion and, in addition, the oil which is added to the petrol burns produces noxious gases like sulphur dioxide.

**T**he authorities don't seem to understand that people would like

cleaner air to breathe, but they don't want to be harassed at every turn without easily available options to enable them to obey rules. Exhaust emission standards have been formulated and implemented in a very unscientific and impractical way. It punishes millions of users without putting enough pressure on the manufacturers.

A sensible procedure would be something like this. Exhaust emission standards could be set at three levels: a lax one for vehicles manufactured before 1980, a stricter one for vehicles manufactured between 1980 and 1993 and a very strict one for vehicles



**Maneka Gandhi: up against vested interests**

manufactured after 1993. This last standard should be as strict as any in the world.

After setting the standards, the government should ask all the manufacturers and various scientific laboratories working on internal combustion to come up with pollution reducing techniques and technologies within one year. These technologies could include retrofit devices for exhausts, etc. Consumers should also be warned that solutions for reducing pollutants in vehicle exhausts will be available in a year and strict checking would start after 18 months.

Having done this the government should then instruct all official vehicles to set an example by being the first to satisfy the new standards.

Bureaucrats in India don't seem to have learned any lessons from consumer movements in other countries. It appears that whenever legislation in favour of consumers is enacted, which puts the major brunt on the consumers themselves, they react negatively. Witness the taxi and scooter strikes against vehicle pollution laws. One of the best examples to illustrate this comes from the USA. In the Seventies, a belt-interlock standard was enacted in the US. This law required that the ignition of cars be so wired that unless the occupants put on their seat belts, the cars wouldn't start. This

was to ensure that people used seat belts while driving cars. But there were so many cases of malfunctioning that a large number of people couldn't start their cars even when they had their belts on. There was such an uproar against the law that it had to be repealed. It is suspected that this experience also turned many people against consumer protection regulations for years to come. Quite obviously, if consumer protection advocates operate in a ham-handed manner they can

end up working against themselves.

What Maneka Gandhi needs is bureaucrats who are committed to environmental protection, and understand consumer needs and behaviour. These bureaucrats must also be able to judge which standard in India should be stricter than European standards and which more liberal. Mrs. Gandhi seems to have already realised that environmental policing is not only difficult but at times counter-productive. We hope she can institute policies and enforce systems which depend upon the self interest of the people. •

The author is a member of the Centre for Biomedical Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.



# DERAILED!

*Indian Railways threatens to quit the national sporting scene*

**I**ndian Railways is faced with its severest test of loyalty after serving Indian sport for 62 years. Realising that many sporting federations were biting the hand that was feeding them, the Railways will, in the next few months, have to decide whether or not it should continue to have the 'dubious distinction' of being one of the principal benefactors of sport in the country.

The contribution of the Railways to Indian sport has been much greater than any other organisation in the country. Starting from the setting up of federations, the Railways has provided infrastructure, finance and sporting personnel in unmatched quantity and volume to the 24 disciplines to which it is affiliated. Among all sporting establishments, it is the Railways which has provided the largest number of not only international-level players, but recipients of both the Padma Shri and the Arjuna award as well.

But now, for the first time in 62 years, the Railways is seriously considering whether it should continue helping Indian sport with men and material. And nowhere is this more evident than in the field of football. Having turned down several feasible proposals of the Railways, the All India Football Federation (AIFF), added insult to injury this year by allowing a Railways player to don the colours of Bengal in the national championships for the Santosh Trophy.

This competition was held in two phases. Prayagopal Goswami represented the Railways in the first phase, but switched to Bengal for the second. The Railways objected, but the protest was rejected on technical grounds. The player concerned is registered as a footballer for Eastern Railway club, which in turn is affiliated to the IFA, the controlling body of the sport in West Bengal. Following the IFA rules for transfer of players from one club to another, Goswami signed to play for East Bengal from the year beginning May 1990. Once he had done so, he

became eligible to represent Bengal and was chosen accordingly by the state's selection committee.

The Railways is aggrieved because the player was given a job solely for his sporting talent. Legally, the player may have been well within his rights, but he had no moral justification to switch loyalty. Goswami will have to pay a whopping fine for violating his employment contract, which states that he has to play for the Railways for at least three years before he could think of a change. But that is a matter of service rules.

Actually, resentment against the AIFF has been brewing in the Railways for quite some time. One of the principal issues has been the recruitment of players, for the junior championships. The age limit here is 19, which makes it very difficult for the Railways to get enough players because employing youngsters below that age is very difficult. Besides, even after such players are recruited and play for the organisation till they are 19, there is no guarantee that their initial potential will be realised once they mature. In such cases, the Railways face the problem of having to persist with people in their rolls who have absolutely no contribution to offer.

"In order to avoid this problem, we have been requesting the AIFF to reconsider its rules," says Amrit Mathur, the secretary of the Railway Sports Control Board. "We have told them, that in cricket and other disciplines, we are allowed to field a team of Railway family members and dependants. We gave examples of how this bending of rules has benefitted

Indian cricket. In the under-19 teams that played against Pakistan, we had Manwinder Singh who acquitted himself very well. Two of our under-19 players were on stand-by for the same tour—Dharminder Mishra and Atul Sharma.

"But the AIFF has been stalling for months. When we approached P R Das Munshi, he was still a central minister. In October last year, the matter was brought up at the annual general meeting. But nothing was achieved beyond an inconclusive discussion. We have now decided that if we can't recruit from within the Railway family, we will stop taking part in the junior nationals. And this will be true of every discipline in which we participate."





In almost every organised sport in the country, the Railways has contributed in real terms. Even before its affiliation with the Indian Hockey Federation (IHF), six Railway players represented India in the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam—where India made its debut in the game and began its long string of successes at the highest level of the sport. Even today, the Railways contributes players regularly to the Indian team.

In athletics, the Railways' successes have rivalled that of hockey, with the trail-blazing P.T. Usha leading the pack of outstanding athletes who have contributed greatly to Indian athletics. But it is perhaps from football that the best-known players—apart from Usha—have come. Starting from the illustrious player of the Twenties, Samad, the list includes players like Mewalal, Sanjeeva, Sunil and Nikhil Nandy and, of course, P.K. Banerjee, whose belated Padma Shri came only in 1989, although he was in the first batch of Arjun awarddees, way back

**Railways playing Tamil Nadu in the Santosh Trophy: glorious history**



## PRIDE OF THE RAILWAYS



**P.K. Banerjee (left) and P.T. Usha: nation's glory**

in 1961.

It was in the same year that another outstanding sportsman, Buddy D' Souza, was given the same honour. He was just one in a line of brilliant boxers promoted by the Railways—like Laurie Carr, A.A. Arathoon, 'Tanker' Green, F. D'Silva, T. Green, the Nag brothers and Babulal, along with the Khatau brothers, Percy and Sammy. The list continues to grow with each passing year, with pugilists like C. Laxminathan continuing the good work in the 1990 nationals in Calcutta.

Both in men's and women's disciplines, the Railways have been taking a leading role at the national level. Each year, the Railways notch up victories in almost every sport in which they take part. This is natural, considering that the vast network of the railways and its liberal recruitment policy allows sportsmen and women from several disciplines to join.

But the Railways have not been sitting idle on the vast talent falling on its lap, so to speak. It provides a lot of facilities for players to further their prowess. One of the springboards for this is the infrastructure, painstakingly built up over the years. In almost every division of the railways, there is a stadium for some sport or other.

"But we are now shifting our emphasis, from the purely recreational and generally basic approach to sport to the more specialised, professional attitude which is prevalent in the world today," says Mathur. "For this, we have finalised a unique scheme of importing the latest equipment for certain sports. We believe that only if we provide the best facilities, can the talent of our sportsmen be fully utilised. Artificial surfaces for various sports like hockey and badminton, imported cycles for international competitions and the like, as well as kit and gear for other sports are what we are importing with the help of the government and the Sports Authority of India."

"But what we hope will be the biggest boon to sportsmen throughout the country are the modern health centres all over the country, starting with the one in Delhi. These will have the latest equipment and machines to monitor the progress of athletes and sportsmen as also to help maintain peak physical fitness."

The Railways is doing a world of good to Indian sport. It is time officials realise this, as also the implications of this giant organisation's withdrawal from the national scene. ●

**Arijit Sen/ Calcutta**





## Rails on air

■ Remember S.K. Chawla—the man who set up Appu Ghar, the entertainment park in Delhi? Well, he is in the news again—this time, with plans of revamping the transport system. Chawla feels he has the answer to traffic snarls and frayed tempers and is trying to sell the government a blueprint of his rapid transport system.

He envisages an elevated extra-light micro-transport

network which will run 20 feet above the ground. This system, Chawla claims, will be cheaper than any railway network. He has received a fair amount of attention and even featured in the national programme on Doordarshan. However, unfortunately for him, the railway ministry has turned down his plan and claims that Chawla has not even done basic research on the project. But Chawla does not seem to be bothered by this. He is throwing lavish press conferences at five-star hotels and still talking about roller-coaster rides

## Narayan goes Russian

■ His description of the many idiosyncrasies of life, the plight of the common man and just about everything that is happening around us have

won him many admirers. And now, even the Russians will get a glimpse of R.K. Narayan's world—peopled, as it is, by innumerable interesting characters

The Izvestia Publishing House of Moscow has translated and brought out 50,000 copies of a collection of stories by Narayan. Notable in this collection is Narayan's famous short novel, *Chatterbox*. One wonders how the Russians will take to R.K. Narayan

## Music comes home

■ Music lovers take heart. HMV has decided to sponsor a 'music lovers club'. After creating some sort of musical history recently, when the sales of its cassette *Maine Pyar Kiya* crossed the three-million mark (the

highest ever in India), the company is brimming with plans.

In fact, cassettes and compact discs will be taken to the doorsteps of the club's members, either through courier or mail. And by paying a fee of Rs 100 to Rs 150, the members will be entitled to monthly catalogues and pre-release samples. Besides, they will be getting discounts on some cassettes as well. So now, homes will be alive with the sound of music



ILLUSTRATIONS: DEBASHIS DEB

## THIS INDIA

**NASIK:** This is not an advertisement for mosquito coils. But if Vasudev Beldar had had one, his bride-to-be may not have disappeared on the eve of their wedding. The girl and her relatives said they would sleep in a nearby lodge as the marriage hall had too many mosquitoes and arrive in the morning for the wedding. But Vasudev waited in vain. Finally, the boy's relatives were forced to find another bride for him—*The Hindustan Times* (Brajendra Singh, New Delhi)



**CALCUTTA:** Having heard much praise of the Chinese cuisine at a five-star hotel of the city, a foreigner walked in to taste its delights. He was in for a rude shock. Starting on his second mouthful, he spied a creature on his plate. Convinced that it was a cockroach, he asked to see the restaurant-in-charge. The latter denied outright the existence of the cockroach, saying it was only a palatable ingredient of the dish. After some polite exchanges which got more and more heated, the in-charge found himself in a tight spot. Seeing no other way of convincing the foreigner, he

picked up the cockroach and swallowed it. While the stunned guest stared in disbelief, the in-charge rushed out and, apparently, threw up. His valour was not wasted. It earned him a promotion that very day—*The Telegraph* (Subir Bosu, Calcutta)

**BELLARY:** The craze for epic serials on the idiot box is nothing new. But a driver of a super-fast train with 2,000 passengers stopping the train at a wayside station and just walking away to see *Mahabharat* is incredible. According to one S.R. Rao, who boarded the Karnataka Express at Bangalore, to go to Delhi, the train arrived at Mandideep station between Bhopal and Bhusaval around 9 am on a Sunday. There, the driver of the train simply disappeared and nobody knew where he had gone. Only later did the passengers come to know that he had gone to see *Mahabharat*. Rao promptly recorded his protest in a complaint book—*Indian Express* (V.V. Kadam, Bangalore)

**HYDERABAD:** V. Ravindra Kumar has always had a penchant for the unusual. And recently, this inclination got him into the *Guinness Book Of World Records*. With an audience of over 1,500 listening to him in rapt attention, Kumar whistled songs for 45 hours and 20 minutes at Sri Krishna Theosophical Society in Guntur. This unique feat eclipsed the previous record of 35 hours by a Canadian—*The Times of India* (D.J. Patro, Bhubaneswar) •



BEGINNING 10 JUNE 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



A fair measure of success is in store for you. Financial gains are also indicated. A friend may help you to solve a problem on the domestic front. Children will be a source of joy. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 10, 12 and 16

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



You may incur financial loss this week. But a number of opportunities to make amends will come your way. The time is particularly favourable for the unemployed. You will benefit through someone in authority.

**Good dates:** 12, 14 and 16

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 5

**Favourable direction:** North

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This is a busy and hectic week for you. Be prepared for any eventuality. The time is favourable for those appearing in examinations. A long planned journey will finally materialise.

**Good dates:** 11, 13 and 15

**Lucky numbers:** 6, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** East

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



Be prepared to undertake any assignment this week. The time is ripe for creative people. You will gain financially. Matters of the heart and those relating to your family are well indicated.

**Good dates:** 13, 14 and 15

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North-west.

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



You will tide over your problems this week. The time is favourable for intellectuals and creative people. Exercise tact and be on your guard against deceit. Love and matrimonials will make steady progress.

**Good dates:** 12, 13 and 14

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 5 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



Someone close to you will cause anxiety. But you may overcome that with the help of your friends. The time is ripe for investment and gambling. You may have to shoulder new responsibilities. Look after your health.

**Good dates:** 10, 11 and 13

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



Lack of funds may hold you back from implementing some of your plans. However, the time is favourable for those seeking jobs. Love and matrimonials will make steady progress.

**Good dates:** 11, 12 and 16

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



You will enjoy good company this week. Too much of idealism may hamper your progress. You are all set to take up new challenges. Make the best use of the opportunities that come your way. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 13, 14 and 15

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3 and 6

**Favourable direction:** North-west

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



You have reasons to be worried this week. Be on your guard against deceit. Even family members might keep away from you. However, courage and fortitude will see you through your problems.

**Good dates:** 12, 13 and 15

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 7 and 8

**Favourable direction:** West

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



This will be a hectic week for you. You may have to face a few problems on the professional front. The time is not favourable for love and matrimony. Exercise tact and patience with your friends.

**Good dates:** 10, 13 and 14

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 3 and 6

**Favourable direction:** East

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



Your efforts will bear fruit this week. Be cautious in dealing with your friends and family members. Keep an eye on your health. Love and matrimonials are not well indicated. You will gain financially.

**Good dates:** 14, 15 and 16

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 5 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



A fair measure of fortune and success is in store for you. Friends and acquaintances will be the source of inspiration for you. Do not hesitate to take up challenges, as the time is favourable and promises good results.

**Good dates:** 10, 11 and 12

**Lucky numbers:** 7, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** North

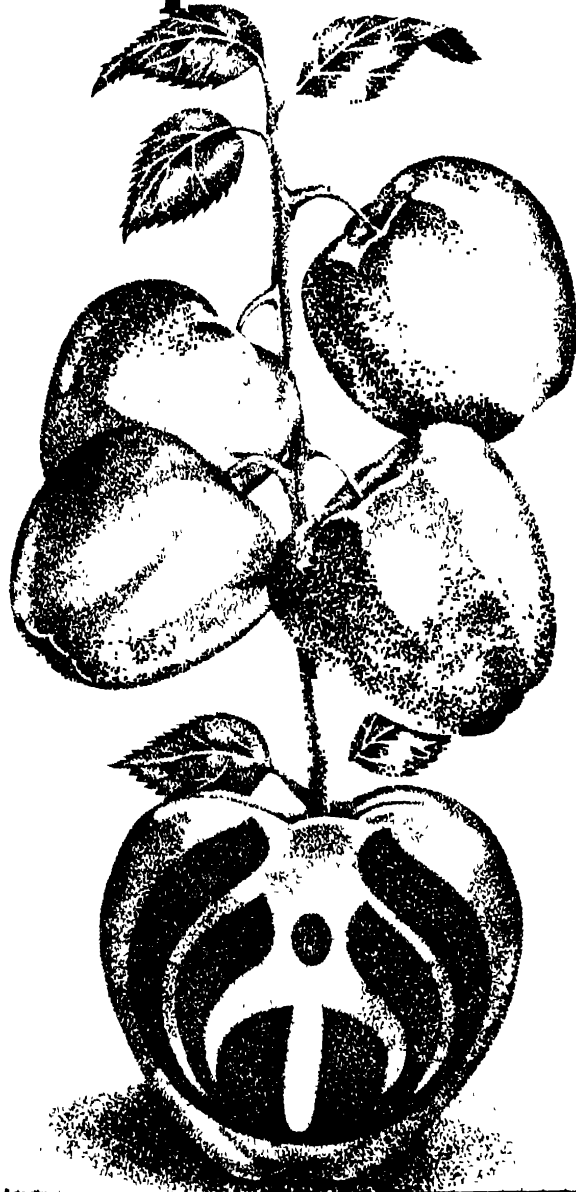
## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—VIRGO

*The Virgoan man has a serious attitude to life, but the Libran woman allows life to take its own course. This typical Libran characteristic might lead to problems. However, if she does not keep her emotions under control, she will lose her partner's sympathy. •*



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## Fast forward

■ She spent her first term as Congress(I) MP leading the glamour brigade of the party. But Vyjanthimala Bali has, apparently, had enough of smirking from the sidelines, and is, instead, intent on staking her claim to the leadership of the Tamil Nadu PCC(I).

She got her chance when the party organised a protest fast against the DMK government. Bali chose to stay away from the official venue, organising a "parallel fast" a little distance away.

An enraged PCC(I) president K. Ramamurthy immediately called Delhi.



**Vyjanthimala Bali: taking on Ramamurthy**

asking for disciplinary action against the rebel lady. But to no avail: Bali enjoys far too good a rapport with the Congress high command.

Ramamurthy, however, succeeded in wresting one assurance from the party leadership: he will not be divested of the PCC(I) presidency.

Not in the near future, anyway.

## Sticking up for Scindia

■ Grant this to George Fernandes: he calls a Raja a Raja.

HEARD AT THE BOMBAY GYMKHANA

**The way Maneka Gandhi is going, she will do for the environment what her late husband did for family planning.**

A DISMAYED ENVIRONMENTALIST ON MRS GANDHI'S ABILITY TO LOSE FRIENDS AND IRRITATE PEOPLE



**Madhavrao Scindia: a supporter in George**

On a recent visit to Gwalior the railways minister was asked to lunch by his predecessor, Madhavrao



**George Fernandes: who's afraid of royalty?**

Scindia. Fernandes readily accepted; to the consternation of the state Dal leaders, who insisted that he

shouldn't fraternise "with a Raja".

Countered Fernandes: "If you can accept the Raja of Manda as the leader of your party, why can't I have lunch with the Raja of Gwalior?"

That wasn't all. Later, Fernandes in a rare gesture invited Scindia to a railway ministry function as chief guest. And while presiding over the show, praised Scindia's contribution to the Great Indian Railway.

## Fear is the key

■ There's no doubt about it: the Chimanbhai Patel ministry in Gujarat *does* mean business. Ask the 27 former Congress(I) MLAs who found the locks of their quarters broken open by the Dal-BJP coalition government.

The story goes thus. Even after losing the 27 February Assembly polls, 114 Congress members continued to occupy the



**Patel: no-nonsense CM**

MLAs' Hostel Quarters in Gandhinagar.

Minister Dinsha Patel threatened to evict them forcibly if they didn't move out soonest. All but 27 of the trespassers obliged.

A one-week notice was then served on those who still remained in residence. When even that didn't work, the government sent its officials—with an executive magistrate in tow—to break open and take possession. ●

## THERMOMETER

*Who speaks for the Congress(I) in Parliament*

■ **Vasant Sathe:** One of the most witty and urbane members the Congress can boast of (though, admittedly, he doesn't have much competition), the former Union minister leads the attack against the Dal government.

■ **Dinesh Singh:** Manages to keep the Raja's ministers on their toes with his combative manner and incisive questions. Has pretensions to being the foreign affairs specialist of the Congress but Rajiv doesn't seem too impressed by his credentials.

■ **P. Chidambaram:** Holds forth—in his well-modulated, Harvard-returned tones—on every subject under the sun. But is specially vocal during discussions involving the deteriorating law and order situation. He is, after all, the former minister of state for home.

■ **P. Shiv Shankar:** Leader of the Congress in the Rajya Sabha, he manages to get a word (well, many words actually) in when M. L. Fotedar, is not looking.

■ **M. L. Fotedar:** While his ability as an orator remains debatable, he is undeniably a great motivator of men: witness his success in getting Congress members to disrupt proceedings ever so often.



## Homing in

■ Santosh Bharatiya may well have overplayed his hand this time. Or, to use another cliché, burnt his bridges with the Raja.

The journo-turned-politician took up the let's-get-rid-of-the-Mufti campaign with great enthusiasm, getting a number of party members to sign a memorandum asking for the home minister's resignation. The MPs obliged, secure in the knowledge that if Bharatiya was leading the effort, it must have the Prime Minister's blessings.



**Santosh Bharatiya: discredited courtier**

When things appeared to be getting out of control, Union ministers Satyapal Malik, P. Upendra and S. Gurupadaswamy complained to V.P. Singh about his protégé's antics. The Raja was livid. And promptly sent Anif Mohammad Khan to the Mufti's residence with the message that if the home minister resigned from the government, the Prime Minister would quit as well.

As for Bharatiya, he's been trying to see the Raja ever since. With little success.

HEARD IN CENTRAL HALL

**If the V.P. Singh government lasts, the country won't.**

R.K. TEWARI CONGRESS(I) LEADER

## A communist and a Raja

■ Why does CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee refuse to criticise the Raja—or the Dal government—in the Lok Sabha, no matter how grave the provocation?

Dal dissidents and members of the BJP may take on the regime for its non-performance on various fronts (price rise, law and order, Jammu and Kashmir) but Chatterjee keeps mum. It is, therefore, left to such lesser lights as Saifuddin Chaudhuri, Geeta Mukherjee and Subhashini Ali to attack the government on behalf of the communist brigade.

But why does Chatterjee



**Somnath Chatterjee: more loyal than the Raja**

persist with his blind loyalty? Nobody knows for sure, but insiders insist that the breakfast meetings the

communist and the Raja have been having of late may, at least, be part of the explanation.

## Exit: the factotum

■ Recently, the chief factotum of the Congress(I), R.K. Dhawan was seen scurrying out of the Presidential Estate residence of deputy prime minister Devi Lal. And that led to the usual spate of stories.

One version had it that Dhawan was being used as the conduit between Congress president Rajiv Gandhi and the Tau. Apparently, Gandhi wished to win the Chaudhary over, to launch a joint assault against V.P. Singh. Hence, the Congress' long silence on the Meham issue.



**R.K. Dhawan: Lal's not amused**

But that scenario was wrecked by Rajiv when he decided to lead a party delegation on a tour of Meham after Independent candidate Amir Singh was killed. Devi Lal was incensed at what he perceived as betrayal of his cause. And the next time the raven-haired Dhawan slithered into the Jat's residence, he was unceremoniously booted out.

## THERMOMETER

### All the Janata Dal's parliamentary speakers

■ **Madhu Dandavate:** Is one of the most respected ministers of the government, and the Raja fields him in the House as often as possible

■ **Satyapal Malik:** Minister of state for parliamentary affairs, Malik is entrusted with the responsibility of presenting the government's case in the Lok Sabha. And performs the job to the best of his ability—such as it is.

■ **K.C. Tyagi:** An ardent supporter of Devi Lal and progeny, Tyagi's debating skills are devoted to defending the Tau in the face of the concerted Opposition attack. On occasion, of course, he defends the government as well.

■ **S. Gurupadaswamy:** Got the job of leader of the Raja Sabha by virtue of being the Raja's favourite, but has grown into it, despite his limitations.

■ **G. Jaipal Reddy:** General secretary of the Janata Dal, he has honed his oratorical skills in the course of the several hundred press briefings he has held over the years. And is today, one of the more convincing speakers of the Raja's regime.



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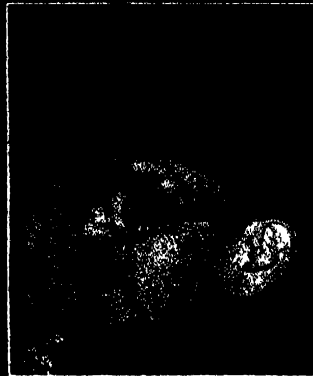


**INDIA REDISCOVERS AYURVEDA**

# SUNDAY

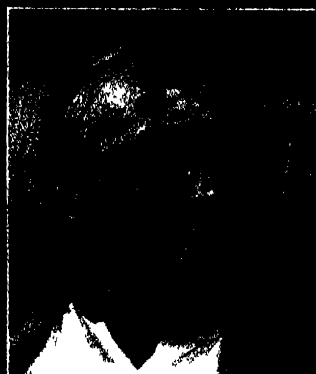


**RAJIV GANDHI**



**V.P. SINGH**

## WOULD A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT WORK?



**JYOTI BASU**



**L.K. ADVANI**

And why has  
V.P. Singh  
thought of it  
now?



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we reach one summit,  
we strive  
for the next.**



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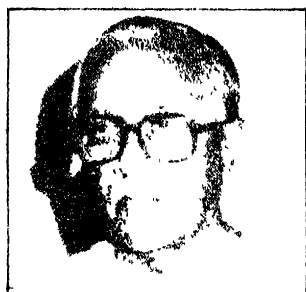
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And why has V.P. Singh thought of it now?

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Though he maintained a low profile on his 'working holiday', V.P. Singh managed to get his way on most issues



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Green minister Maneka Gandhi is divested of all real powers

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## The charismatic communist

**J**yoti Basu is undoubtedly the most powerful man in the country today (*The marxist kingmaker*, 27 May—2 June). A seasoned campaigner, Basu is respected by all political heavyweights. So powerful is he in the context of the present situation, that he even has the power to bring down the government because the CPI(M) is an important part of the ruling coalition at the Centre. This is a support that V P. Singh cannot do without. Anyone else in Jyoti Basu's shoes would have misused the clout that he wields. But not the charismatic communist from Bengal. He remains what he was—a modest man.

**K. Chidanand Kumar, Bangalore (Karnataka)**

■ It is indeed strange that Jyoti Basu is being credited with such accolades as "marxist kingmaker". The title would have better suited deputy PM Devi Lal, without whose support V P. Singh would not have been Prime Minister. Basu may be making frequent trips to Delhi, hobnobbing with the powers that be in the capital but what about his own state West Bengal? Bengal's industrial and political problems have not improved in any way in the past decade of CPI(M) rule. Basu should pay more attention to problems like

the pathetic civil conditions in Calcutta, the rising prices and the industrial backwardness that continue to plague the state. To the common man in West Bengal, Basu's political foresight, his great friendship with Dhirubhai Ambani, and his charisma are of no value whatsoever because they will not solve the state's problems. If a mere pleasing personality were enough, Rajiv Gandhi would not be out of power. In 1984, no one thought the former PM would be out of favour, but now he is. Basu has been given more chances to prove his worth than our ex-PM, but the electorate's patience is running out. If he doesn't deliver, he will find himself out of power very soon.

**Mohan Nair, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

■ The cover story was interesting. It is a well-known fact that Jyoti

**Jyoti Basu: wielding power**



Basu played a decisive and crucial role in making V P. Singh Prime Minister. Basu's clout in Delhi is not merely due to the status of his party in Parliament, but also due to his personal credibility and experience as a shrewd politician. He has seen enough ups and downs during the span of his chequered career to be able to emerge a true pragmatist whose foresight and political acumen are an asset to his party. Though his political philosophy goes against the democratic system adopted by the Constitution, Basu has adapted himself to the situation remarkably well. Small wonder then that he now leads a party that has been in power in Bengal for more than a decade. Basu is not just a kingmaker—he is the uncrowned king of Bengal's politics today.

**Nandadulal Roy Chowdhury, Kharagpur (West Bengal)**

## Mockery of democracy

**T**he recent re-countermanding of the Meham byelection following the cold-blooded murder of the Independent candidate, Amir Singh, is a grim reminder of the mayhem that now has Haryana in its grips. Indian democracy has never seen such a mockery of its electoral process as witnessed in this constituency. And surely it would not be



**Om Prakash Chautala: still the boss**

wrong to say that the father-son duo of Devi Lal and Om Prakash Chautala are responsible for the chaotic situation in the state today. Even after his resignation, the Tau's elder son has not ceased to pull the strings in the local political scene. Banarsi Das Gupta may have been chosen the new CM, but he is the only the *de facto* chief minister. Real power is in the hands of Chautala. As far as Haryana is concerned he is still the boss.

**Shashank Shekhar, Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)**

## Multi-purpose project

**R**avi Chopra's attempts to televise the world's greatest epic *Mahabharat* are indeed commendable (*End of an epic*, 20—26 May). The serial itself was evidence of his skill in the



of direction. The serial is doing extremely well and has helped the Chopras to regain their lost popularity. The epic venture is a feast for the eyes and for the past 84 weeks it has regaled the average Indian tele-viewer with exciting tales from the popular epic. Indeed the *Mahabharat* has served various purposes—it has entertained the God-fearing, mythology-loving people of India giving them what they love most—a strange concoction called *masala*-formula, it has defeated the Congress(I) through its regular forecasts from the Janata Dal's *kaal chakra*, but more importantly it has helped to arouse in the minds of the religion-conscious Hindus of the nation a desire to transform secular India into *Hindu-sihan* (abode of Hindus—only).

If a plain mythology is able to bring about such dramatic changes, can we now expect a '*Uttar/Dakshin Mahabharat*' on our tube soon?

**Ms. Sufyan Sadig, Cuttack (Orissa)**

■ The cover story carried a picture of a star smoking a cigarette with the following narration beneath it "A star off duty the image goes up in smoke." It is difficult to understand why a national magazine like *SUNDAY* thinks that an actor must give up the simple pleasures of life only to save his screen image. This is precisely what is wrong with Indians—we tend to identify the person by the role he plays forgetting that it is only reel life and not real life. For that matter *Ramayan's* Sita, Deepika had acted in several C-grade movies in bare-all-dare-all roles before she became the tele Sita. But surely it is up to her to decide her future. As viewers we have very little



**A scene from *Mahabharat*: TV's blockbuster**

right to pass judgements on others

These serials, apart from throwing up silly controversies like these, seem to be useful for just one more reason. We get to see all sorts of advertisements before them, and frankly speaking most of these are far more slickly produced than our blockbusters

**A. Srinivasa Murthy, Secunderabad (Andhra Pradesh)**

## An interesting encounter

The way the Bihari babu (Shatrughan Sinha) responded to tricky questions in his encounter with superstar Bachchan,

reveals his matured and shrewd political brain ("*I am nobody's private property*", 27 May - 2 June). The interview proved, more than anything else, the self-confidence that has helped Sinha not only in his silver screen career, but also in his role as a politician. As a Janata Dal spokesman, Sinha is successful where Bachchan had failed. He has handled the questions on Bofors, St Kitts, the involvement of the Hinduja and Win Chadha, Ajitabh Bachchan and the like remarkably well. What is more he has not allowed himself to get carried away by his antagonism for the Congress (I) or his support for the Janata Dal.

Infact his honest criticism

**Bachchan (left) with Sinha: diamond cuts diamond**



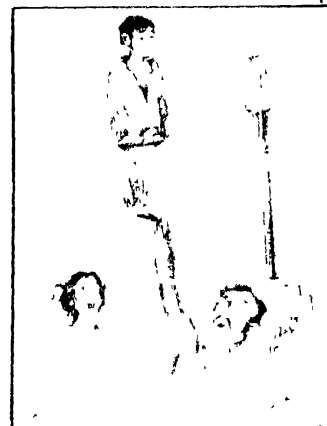
**GAUTAM PATOLE**

of the party in power gave a tremendous amount of credibility to his answers, something that most cine stars supporting the Congress seem to lack.

**Harekrushna Mohanta, New Delhi**

■ Amitabh Bachchan's interview of Shatrughan Sinha made interesting reading. If one takes the pains to read between the lines, the encounter has helped to bring out their personalities. Sinha came across as the eternal loud-mouth that he has always reputed to have been and Bachchan came across as a suave and intelligent person. Congratulations for the excellent piece.

**Ritesh Mishra, Bhubaneswar (Orissa)**



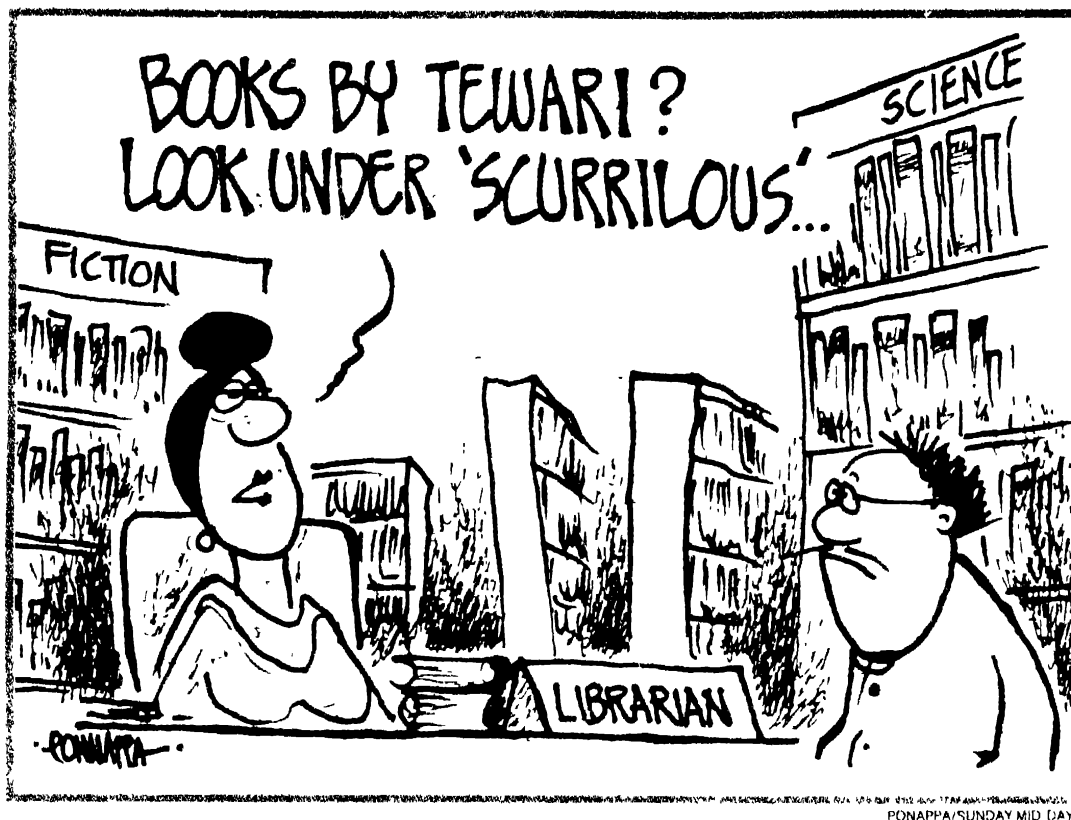
**Calcutta: captured by Laxman**

## Salaam Calcutta

The myriad manifestations of Calcutta as captured by R. K. Laxman in his own unusual manner were interesting (*Laxman's Calcutta*, 6-12 May). The lively cartoons depicting various aspects of the city that accompanied the piece were simply excellent. By unveiling the day-to-day mysteries, the joys and sorrows of a big metropolis like Calcutta, the cartoonist has successfully captured the essence of the city. ●

**Meena Bhimani, New Delhi**





PONAPPA/SUNDAY MID DAY



**H.K.L. BHAGAT, AICC (I) general secretary, on whether his party was part of any move to topple the government**

This proves that Hegde is not only a contemptible liar but also a despicable coward for shifting the blame for tapping of telephones on eminent persons...to police officers.

**DR SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY, Janata Party MP**

■ He has an unenviable task of making bricks without straw and a strong Cabinet with lack-lustre men.

**M.V. KAMATH, journalist, on V. P. Singh's task at hand**

■ I don't think the press can make or mar anybody's image. The press is presuming too much.

**CHANDRA SHEKHAR, Janata Dal member**

■ The Janata Dal is a gift of Devi Lal

**OM PRAKASH CHAUTALA, former Haryana chief minister**

■ I am nobody's man or nominee

**BANARSI DAS GUPTA, chief minister of Haryana, on whether he was Chautala's man**

■ What are you doing here? I am on holiday here

**JYOTI BASU, West Bengal chief minister, in Bhutan, to a team of reporters from Calcutta**

■ Who is Dhawan by the way? He is just an obedient assistant just like a peon.

**VASANT SATHE, Congress (I) MP**

■ We must remember that when the Bhakra Nangal dam was planned, there was opposition on similar grounds. The dam

was finally built and the benefits are there for all to see.

**NILAMANI ROUTHAY, environment and forests minister, on the ecological threats posed by the Narmada and Tehri projects**

■ Plastic surgery, a hair transplant, lipo-suction and a remake of *Maine Pyar Kiya* with me in the lead.

**ANUPAM KHER, actor, on his future plans**



■ It is not my purpose in life to remove him (Rajiv Gandhi) from every post. He is the president of the Congress (I) and so as long as that party wants him as chief, it is perfectly all right to me

**V P SINGH, Prime Minister**

■ We do not know of any such move ... We are only interested in regaining the faith of the people and coming back on their support.



# Lessons for bureaucrats



What a bureaucrat should and should not do in a democracy is best illustrated by what an eminent civil servant did and refused to do under

pressure of his seniors and political bosses. Of the seniormost with an illustrious career is the 86-year-old Dharamvira, who joined the ICS in 1930, served as principal private secretary to India's first Prime Minister, minister (commercial) under Krishna Menon in London, ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Cabinet Secretary, Governor of West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana and Karnataka. He was also chairman of the National Police Commission; his report like many others collects dust in the archives. Dharamvira has put his experiences in a book *Reminiscences* (Vikas).

Dharamvira, son of a distinguished engineer, Raja Jawala Prasad, was born in Patiala in 1906. He was educated mostly at home and was by no means a topper. Also handicapped being an extremely short-statured *bania*. He overcame this handicap by excelling at sports and never suffered from inferiority complex because of his size. After taking his degree from Lucknow and Allahabad, he joined the London School of Economics, studied under Harold Laski, and qualified for the ICS.

Dharamvira's first posting was in Aligarh. His English superior, Percival Marsh (later Sir Percival), was district magistrate. Marsh told him, "Two things you must always do. One is to take a decision and take it quickly, right or wrong. Most often you are likely to be right. But even if you are wrong, less damage would be done than by not taking a decision. And, the second thing is that you are an executive officer. You should keep your mouth shut as far as possible. The less you speak the less trouble you will get into. Talking is the task of politicians. You will be judged by your actions and not by your talk."

After Aligarh, Dharamvira was transferred to Meerut, then Almora, where he befriended Nehru who was in jail, and made the acquaintance of

M N Roy. He was the first Indian to be the collector of Bareilly, where he called regularly on Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was imprisoned there. He tells of an amusing encounter with Pandit Pant in Almora jail. He had ordered the police not to arrest *satyagrahis*. Pant sent for him in jail and accused him of killing the movement. "It is true that you are not arresting anybody. But they are returning home looking silly. They are all getting demoralised." Pant gave him a list of men who should be arrested so that they could emerge from jail as heroes. Dharamvira obliged.

Pandit Nehru picked him to be his private secretary. He held the coveted post for four years. He writes of leakages of Cabinet discussions without naming the minister responsible except that he was soon after dropped. Perhaps the minister was Baldev Singh. He also mentions the friction that developed between Nehru and Sardar Patel. Although Nehru's man, Dharamvira shared Patel's views on policy matters. Panditji sent him to assist Krishna Menon in London. He describes his tenure as "the most unpleasant period in my service life". Menon, who believed in having the best for himself—a Rolls Royce, Saville Suits etc.—"when it came to personal behaviour like ringing up officers at 3 am, he could not change". He treated senior civil servants with suspi-

**Dharamvira: an ideal civil servant**



cion and contempt. Within six months he and Menon were not on speaking terms. When Menon entered into contracts with his English cronies for supply of jeeps incurring huge losses to the Indian exchequer, Dharamvira, who had not been consulted, was asked to look into the "Jeep Scandal". His report ended Menon's tenure as high commissioner. Panditji who expected Dharamvira to exonerate his friend turned cold towards him. To get out of the mess, Dharamvira accepted being ambassador to Czechoslovakia. He did not relish the claustrophobic atmosphere in the communist regime and asked to be given a posting at home. He was put in charge of rehabilitating refugees from East Pakistan.

Shastri as Prime Minister appointed him chief commissioner of Delhi. He held that post during the 1965 war with Pakistan. In June 1966, Mrs Gandhi appointed him Governor of Punjab, then under President's Rule to supervise the partition of Punjab into the Suba, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. His next posting was Governor of West Bengal, ruled by the United Front government under Ajoy Mukherjee. The conflict with Dr Ghosh and the Front's reluctance to face the Assembly put Dharamvira in a very awkward position. He dismissed the United Front ministry and invited Dr Ghosh to form a coalition ministry. His decision was questioned in the High Court which upheld his verdict. Then the Ghosh ministry was compelled to abdicate and horse-trading began to win over MLAs. Following Dharamvira's advice, the Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule imposed. A somewhat similar situation developed in Karnataka, where Dharamvira was later transferred, and wranglings between political parties led to Dharamvira assuming presidential powers in the state. It is in these chapters that Dharamvira very lucidly expounds the powers and duties of a Governor as head of a state functioning democratically, how he should act when democratic processes break down and his duties under President's Rule. These chapters should be made compulsory reading for all Governors. •



# The rail yatra

*Is Rajiv Gandhi on the right track at last?*



Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit tells the story with some relish. She is on one of her rare visits to the capital during which she receives a luncheon invitation from her grand-

nephew. She arrives at 7 Race Course Road and chit-chats with Sonia while she waits for the grand-nephew. He arrives in good humour. Lunch is served. Mrs. Pandit watches in astonishment as her host tucks in. When he reaches for his third helping of rice, she softly asks Sonia if he will be going back to work. "Yes," replies Sonia, "but he'll nap for a couple of hours first."

Rajiv Gandhi's lazy and expensive ways have drawn many barbs, most of them undeserved. In 1985 and 1986 he may have been the 'Gucci' Prime Minister following Ronald Reagan's "hard work never killed anybody, but I reckon why take the chance" Monday to Friday presidency, but in the later years of his tenure he worked normal hours. Frequently, even the no-work on Sunday rule, strictly laid down by Sonia, was jettisoned as midnight oil burned at the Mehrauli farm.

Ostentatious living was never a hallmark of the Nehrus. Because they had both money and class, they didn't need to flaunt their aristocracy or wealth. Lunch—always the main meal in the Gandhi household—was a simple, usually vegetarian, *daal-sabzi* affair, and waste was frowned upon. In the presence of guests, Indira once scolded Sanjay for leaving his plate half-full and forced him to finish it. Sonia, despite her fondness for Italian/Continental cuisine and wines, quickly fell in line with the spartan routine.

I have never had the pleasure of lunching or dining with Rajiv at 7 Race Course Road, so I have no direct knowledge of what was served on the table, but by the accounts of those with privileged access, simplicity was conspicuous by its presence. Thus, one can largely discount the colourful

tales of Rajiv's lavish eating and drinking habits while conceding that he does rather like his food. But, looking at their bellies, wouldn't that be true of most Congressmen?

**W**hat does this lunch, life-style introduction have to do with the state of the nation? A great deal. By the time this column appears in print, Mr. Gandhi will have begun the first leg of his 'second-class' *Bharat darshan*—in and around Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan—designed to strengthen national unity, and, in the words of AICC(I) general secretary H K L Bhagat, to "awaken the partymen to their responsibilities."

It is easy, too easy, to make fun of his 'train-about', drawn after much perspiration by the ubiquitous Mani Shankar Aiyar. Already jokes are being made regarding the second-class carriage containing 'Mahatma Rajiv' (According to the party office, Mr. Gandhi, for reasons of logistics, not convenience, will occasionally fly by 'normal' Indian Airlines flights to complete the journey by 22 July.) But, will the compartment be air-conditioned? Will Bisleri water be carried in sealed bottles or will Rajiv hazard Indian Railways' taps? (Can you imagine the Congress president frantically filling his *surahi* at Hardoi station while the guard blows the whistle?) Will a fridge be especially installed? And what about clean loos? Surely some provision will have to be made for them. These might seem mundane matters, but when you are no longer the Prime Minister, they can become a nuisance, especially if the mercury outside hits 43 degrees Celsius. Tit-bits such as these will no doubt regale the nation and possibly detract from the serious purpose behind the *yatra*. One thing, however, is certain: Rajiv will survive the journey.

Those who claim to be knowledgeable about such matters—and that means half the population—insist that the inspiration for this hopefully historic expedition came from Rajiv's equally historic fast at Rajghat. The

public display of stern discipline so impressed the country and the faithful that the Congress president decided to enlarge its scale and scope.

Frankly, I find this hard to swallow. The sight of Rayban Rajiv plonked uncomfortably at Rajghat was so incongruous that even Doordarshan



gave the *tamasha* generous coverage. Besides ridicule, Rajiv gained precious little from Gandhian emulation.

His Meham trip, with an entourage of 300-odd cars was an entirely different affair. This was a well-timed entry and the response Rajiv got by all accounts was phenomenal. I am told that even those who planned the safari were taken aback by the crowds that turned up. The way the people patiently lined up to air their grievances suggested that for them he was still the Prime Minister. (The widely-printed picture of Rajiv Gandhi clutching to his bosom the sobbing widow of the



murdered Independent candidate showed that photo opportunities were not lost.) The spontaneous outpouring of popular affection as witnessed in Meham probably reinforced Rajiv's decision to embark on his Bharat darshan.

**W**hatever its inspiration, it is a shrewd move. The longer Rajiv's handlers keep him caged in Delhi the more isolated he will become from the party and the people. This coupled with the realisation that, despite its surface fragility, the V P Singh-led National Front government was no

seven-day wonder, meant that the Congress president had to go out and plead his case. And what better way to do this than by showing his face to vast numbers of voters?

A minor, but not unimportant, detail. Who will accompany Rajiv on the punishing trip? The faithful Sonia is a must, but what about the coterie? If the whole idea behind the exercise is to set Rajiv 'free', the presence of someone like Satish Sharma or R K. Dhawan or you-know-who will be counter-productive. These people, and I use the word advisedly, are hated in the party from top to bottom

his tour are riven with dissension. In Bihar, Jagannath Mishra is at loggerheads with PCC(I) president Lathan Chowdhury, and Bhagwat Jha Azad and Tariq Anwar have launched a parallel party organisation. In Madhya Pradesh, the situation is worse with Arjun Singh, S C Shukla and Madhavrao Scindia at each other's throats. In UP, Naram Dutt Tiwari sulks. Is he going to defect? Meanwhile, Balram Singh Yadav and Rajendra Kumari Bajpai are not on talking terms. In Assam the party hardly exists, and in Rajasthan, Shiv Charan Mathur and Harideo Joshi have divided the Congress vertically with former PCC chief Ashok Gehlot and the present incumbent in their respective camps. Madhavsingh Solanki and Amarsingh Chowdhary are engaged in a fight to the finish in Gujarat. In Tamil Nadu the situation is no better.

Hopefully, Rajiv Gandhi will use this visit to establish personal contact with state and district level Congress leaders. To expect that he will be able to unite warring factions is unrealistic, but his very presence in their midst will provide a temporary healing touch.

For the people of this country there is something magical and mysterious about 'mass contact'. As a gesture, as an expression of concern for the disadvantaged, it touches the Indian psyche as nothing else does. Gandhiji was the first to demonstrate its hold over the popular imagination. Indira Gandhi began her climb back to power on the back of an elephant, riding into the midst of the poor and dispossessed of Belchi. Why even our tattered and truculent Chandra Shekhar managed to gather quite a halo after his celebrated *padayatra*. Therefore, there is no reason why the grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru, the son of Indira Gandhi, who was most recently Prime Minister, should not improve his image, both within the party and the nation, by reaching out to those who, in the final analysis, decide the fate of politicians.

It could be argued that covering seven states, including UP, MP and Bihar in six weeks is rushing it a bit, but we must take into account the Congress president's stamina and general inclination. Whatever its shortcomings, then, Rajiv Gandhi's decision to go on a 'second class' train journey is the first intelligent thing he has done since he lost office. •



**Rajiv Gandhi at Meham; (left) fasting at Rajghat: on the comeback trail**

Mr Gandhi will be well-advised to leave them at home and put himself in the hands of the AICC(I) general secretaries and local party functionaries.

While the Congress might seem like a sea of tranquillity compared to the turbulence in the Janata Dal, there is much dissatisfaction within the party. Indeed, all the states which Mr Gandhi descends on during the first lap of



# The truth of the matter

*Do newspapers really care about it?*



Till recently, some of our newspapers, particularly the *Indian Express*, appeared very concerned about Truth. Every statement of the former

Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was scrutinised carefully, and if it did not please the media bosses, was labelled, 'A Lie, A Lie, A Lie', front-paged, savaged in cartoons and editorially commented upon.

How times have changed since the new government took over! Prime Minister V P Singh tells journalists on board the IAF aircraft that former Jammu and Kashmir Governor, Jagmohan, had resigned "on his own". And our truth-obsessed newspapers merely carry the comment

This was a surprise. Asked to comment whether his resignation was voluntary, Jagmohan shot back, "I am not going to comment on this." BJP Rajya Sabha member, Jagdish Mathur, accused the Prime Minister of lying on the issue. Giving a blow-by-blow account of the resignation drama, *The Hindu's* special correspondent wrote:

"Mr Jagmohan's recall is believed to have been a personal decision of Prime Minister V.P. Singh, taken in the face of the opposition of some of his Cabinet colleagues, including the home minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. It is understood that the government decided to recall Mr Jagmohan on Wednesday night itself. This was after the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs considered the political situation, arising out of the death of civilians in Srinagar in the cross-firing when the body of Mirwaiz Moulvi was being taken out in a procession, and the demand by the Left parties earlier in the day in the Lok Sabha for change of the Governor. Mr Chandra Shekhar, senior Janata Dal leader, had also strongly supported the demand. Yesterday the Prime Minister desired that Mr Jagmohan be recalled. He was duly called to the capital. He arrived a little before eight last evening. A call about midnight from the Prime Minister's office was an indica-

tion that he would have to go much sooner than expected. At a meeting he had early morning today with the Principal Secretary, Mr B G Deshmukh, it became clear that Mr Jagmohan would have to resign immediately. He met the home minister shortly afterwards. At 10.30 am, the Governor despatched his letter of resignation to the President."

So much for the Prime Minister's comment that Mr Jagmohan quit voluntarily. As for the veracity of *The Hindu* report, if their Bofors exposés are regarded as gospels, why not this too? Newspapers did comment editorially on the Governor's resignation, but not one had anything to say on this lie. Prime Ministers will come and go,

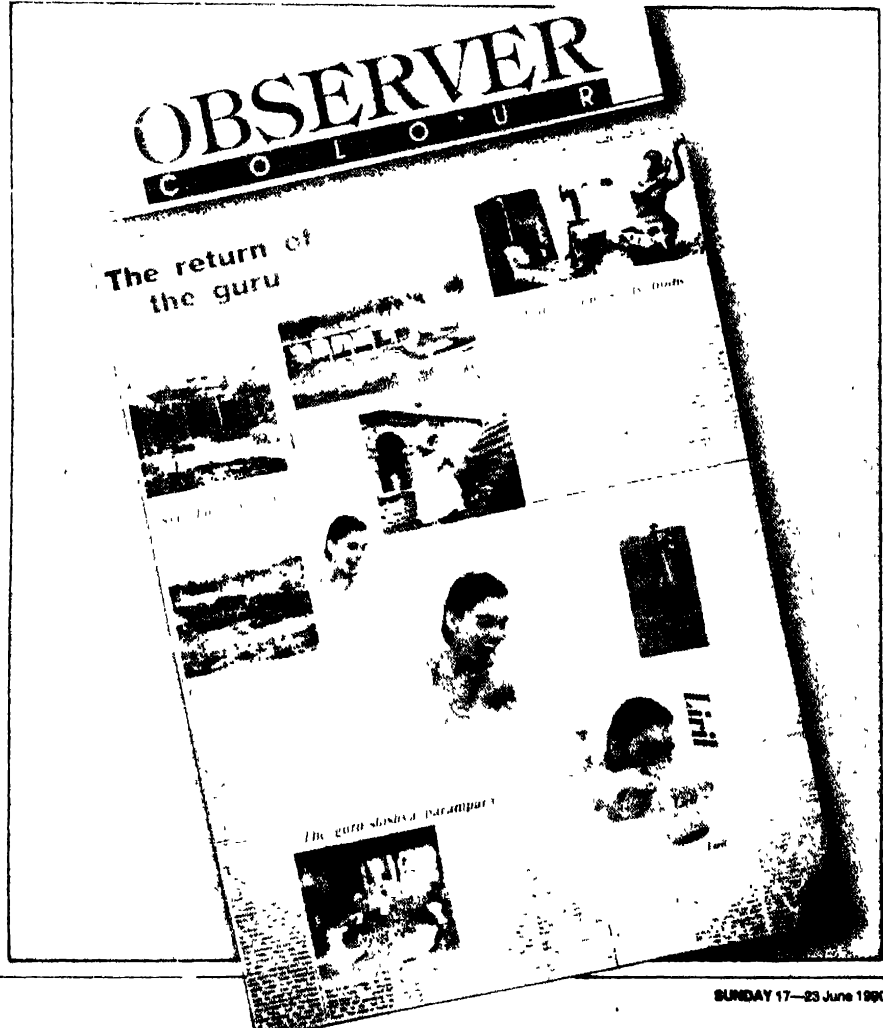
but Truth should not be made an adjustable commodity

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## The British hangover

Colonial hangover? Nostalgia for the good, old Brits? Sheer admiration for the British Broadcasting Corporation? How else can one explain the coverage in most of our leading newspapers of the kidnapping of Mr Yusuf Jameel, staff correspondent of *The Telegraph* in Srinagar, who also worked for the BBC and the Reuters. For two days, *The Times of India* headlined its stories as "BBC reporter kidnapped in Srinagar" and "Army frees the BBC man". Neither of the

**The ad-copy ratio: editorial matter is the first casualty in Sunday newspapers**





stories mentioned that Jameel was the full-time correspondent of *The Telegraph*. The second report also mentioned that "Two senior officers of the army and the home ministry were also present during the hearing on a *habeas corpus* petition filed by Mr Jameel's colleague, Ms Shuba Singh." Since Mr Jameel's connection with the *The Telegraph* has been ignored, should we presume that Ms Singh also works for the BBC?

*The Hindustan Times* was no better headlining the story, "Srinagar newsman abducted" and led with "BBC correspondent Yusuf Jameel had been kidnapped in Srinagar, an official spokesman claimed today" and went on to say, "Mr Jameel, who also works for the other news organisations."

Is the BBC connection that important?

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## It's an ad ad ad world!

Newspapers, we are told, sell more copies on Sundays. The Sunday editions are also priced higher. But what do readers get in return, particularly after the Sunday sections became 'coloured'? A quick survey of some of the leading newspapers makes it clear that readers are being taken for a ride.

*The Times of India's Sunday Review*, bulging with colour advertisements has an editorial/ad ratio of around 25.75. Quite often, popular columns are dropped to make way for more ads. The highly readable *Sunday Observer* is no better. A recent article on Protima Bedi's dance village in Bangalore, in its four-colour section, had three pictures of a girl modelling 'Liril' soap juxtaposed in the body of the article itself, two of them just below the picture of a girl student in a dancing pose! An ad for 'Marvel' soap is placed right in the middle of the 'Birthday Forecast' column. As for other Sunday papers, *The Hindu* and the *The Hindustan Times* are only slightly better. The message is clear. It's the ad boys who are calling the shots, at least on Sundays. Will the editors please wake up?

In this context, some of the smaller papers occasionally come out with absorbing stuff. Recently, the Sunday magazine of the *Gomantak Times*, published from Goa, carried a well-researched, well-written piece on the resurgence of malaria at Panaji. The illustrations were eye-catching and the



The BBC man: Indian newspapers persist in describing Yusuf Jameel thus

statistics were up to date. And there were no large-size colour ads.

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## The disinformation campaign

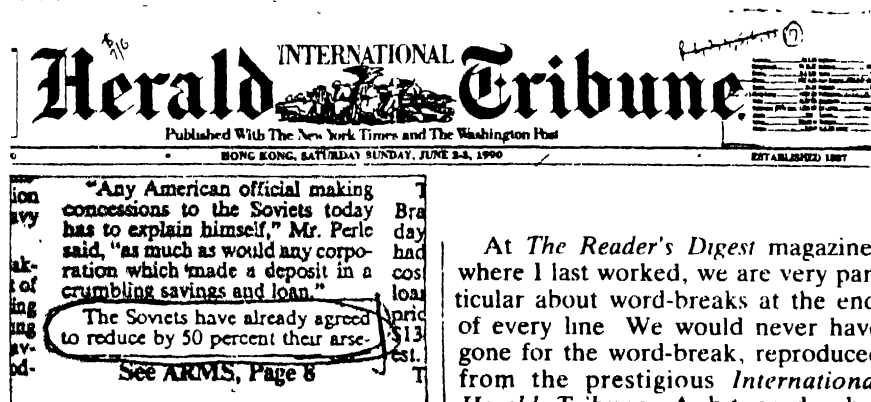
Is Arun Shourie shipping? His latest bombshell on the alleged Madhu Limaye-Chandra Shekhar-Rajiv Gandhi-CPI(M) leaders conspiracy to replace V P Singh with a "national government" had been hotly denied with some of those mentioned in the piece threatening to take the issue to the Press Council. In the same article, Shourie waxed eloquent on the alleged "disinformation campaign" in the media to discredit the government.

"The 'interview' in which Jagmohan was alleged to have said that every Muslim in the Valley had joined the militants. The interview was used to

create chaos in Parliament and now we learn that Jagmohan never gave it. And so on. The very same newspapers which broadcast the lies of Rajiv Gandhi for three years are once again the most zealous in spreading the disinformation today."

There is a contradiction here. Doesn't Shourie know that *Current* weekly which carried the Jagmohan interview is one of the most ardent supporters of V P Singh and even managed to get the Prime Minister to inaugurate its 40th anniversary celebrations recently? *Current* editor, Ayub Sayed, is planning to file a Rs 1 crore libel suit against the Bombay daily, *The Independent*, for mentioning, among other things, that the magazine "had little impact on public opinion."

Let's wait and watch, if Sayed also takes Shourie to court for the alleged disinformation charge!



Word-breaks: bizarre, but funny



# The Malaysian sojourn

*V.P. Singh maintained a low profile on his 'working holiday', but managed to get his way on most issues*

**K**uala Lumpur provided just the break Vishwanath Pratap Singh needed. He escaped at a time when temperatures were soaring in New Delhi and the political climate in the capital was turning a little too hot for comfort. On the morning of 31 May, before the mercury could climb above the 40 degree mark, the Prime Minister took off on a chartered Air India Airbus for five days in Malaysia. He was scheduled to spend three days hobnobbing with the

leaders of the Group of 15 (G-15) developing countries, and one and a half days conferring with his Malaysian counterpart. But it was going to be a relaxed visit with plenty of time to sit back between discussions. And V.P. Singh needed all the time to think and formulate plans to deal with

the crisis engulfing his party, the Janata Dal. For, the weeks ahead promised lots of political action with deputy prime minister Devi Lal determined to humble him.

If the Prime Minister was inwardly perturbed, he did not show it when he appeared before newsmen on board

**V.P. Singh arrives for the opening ceremony of the summit; (right) with Indonesian President Raden Suharto**



**W**hile Gorbachev and Bush were hitting international headlines with their summit level talks at Washington DC, on the other side of the globe, a group of Third World leaders were busy with their own little summit. The meeting of the 'Big-2' might have grabbed most of the front pages worldwide, but the other conference, the G-15 Summit (31 May—3 June) held at the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, was no less portentous. The leaders who gathered at Kuala Lumpur were the bosses of the South (as the bloc of developing countries is collectively termed). And for the first time, they were meeting to chalk out action programmes to demonstrate their collective clout.

The nutty-gritties of the G-15 Summit discussions were not important. The significant part was

## The Southern bosses meet

*The G-15 Summit demonstrates the clout of the developing countries*

that powerful South countries had realised that they would have to give each other concessions, build real ties amongst themselves, or else they would never be able to take on the capos of the rich North and make their presence felt in the fast-changing Gorbachevian era.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad, the Malaysian Prime

Minister, while inaugurating the summit, observed that "self-help" was the best way for the South to solve its economic problems. And this approach marked a new beginning. In the past, the South countries had felt that they must bargain like a trade union against the rich nations of the North. But a decade of pleading did not yield much result. On the contrary, the economically better-off members of the South found the screws tightening on them. The North, clearly, was in no mood to help the new power-centres of the South. It did nothing to ease the debt burden of a number of growing South countries; on the contrary, it began to slap restrictions on imports from these countries.

The Malaysian Prime Minister could not but mention "the fact is that most of our problems arise



the special aircraft headed for the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur. When he was asked what would happen if the deputy prime minister, who was holding the fort in his absence, decided to capture the fort, Singh, without batting an eyelid, replied: "In a democracy, anything can happen." He smilingly assured the newsmen that events would not overtake him. "I will be in touch with Delhi," he added. Before returning to his seat in the front of the aircraft, the Prime Minister also explained the importance of the Malaysian visit and how it would help achieve Indian foreign policy and trade objectives.

Accompanying the Prime Minister was the external affairs minister I K

Gujral and a team of senior officials, including foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey, MEA additional secretary C. Dasgupta, foreign policy adviser in the PMO Ronen Sen, PMO's economics expert Montek Singh Ahluwalia and MEA's publicity chief Aftab Seth. Also travelling with the Prime Minister was his wife, Sita Kumari. The Air India Airbus was crammed with people: 31 government delegates, about 35 media persons and a large contingent of Special Protection Group (SPG) personnel. The size of the delegates' team underlined the importance of the visit. For the Malaysians too, the visit was important and seconds after the aircraft docked, V P Singh was whisked away to the Malay-

sian Parliament House for a ceremonial welcome. Later, a cavalcade of cars and motorcycle outriders escorted him to Kuala Lumpur's de luxe Shangri-La Hotel.

**T**he Prime Minister had not gone to make a spectacular splash in the international scene. Unlike Rajiv Gandhi, who because of his family name had a ready advantage, V.P. Singh is a newcomer in the foreign circuit and has yet to establish himself. At Kuala Lumpur, the Indian Prime Minister was brushing shoulders with world leaders like Indonesia's Raden Suharto, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. If the luminaries who had gathered at Kuala Lumpur respected Singh for anything, it was for his obvious struggle in securing the Indian premiership. Here was a man who had to be watched.

V P Singh, on his part, did not



(Left) The Indian PM with Senegal's President H.E. Abdou Diouf; with Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere (far right)



from our relations with the North." At the same time, he made it clear that talking to the North (or to the seven-member group of OECD countries) would be just one of the actions the G-15 would undertake. More important priorities would be trade, investment and technology flows within the South. "We will continue to be markets for the North but we can, at the same time, develop our economic cooperation and trade with each other," he said.

All this might sound innocuous. But the rich North has reason to be worried. Especially if the more powerful South countries actually implement some of the concrete proposals chalked out in Kuala Lumpur. For instance, countries like Malaysia and Brazil together constitute the largest suppliers of

tin in the world market. If they can agree on marketing and pricing policies on tin, the industrialised North would be in a tight spot. In fact, one of the many proposals contained in the joint communique issued by the G-15 at the conclusion of the summit quite specifically calls for cooperation to strengthen commodity markets and achieve stable, remunerative prices. Similarly, the summit leaders came up with specific proposals on a host of other areas, including information flows, exim financing arrangements, trade promotions, etc.

These decisions, if implemented over the years, could gradually change the face of the world economy. For, the South today is the principal source of most strategic raw materials and possesses the fastest growing markets. Besides,

the G-15 members are not just a group of big-talking leaders, they represent the most powerful section of the South. The 15 nations comprising the group are Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Mexico and Jamaica from Latin America, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe from Africa, India, Malaysia and Indonesia from Asia, and Yugoslavia from Europe.

The G-15 Summit created more than ripples in the international community and, at the end of it, the Malaysian Prime Minister had to assure the world that nothing underhand was afoot. He went on to stress that the summit had no "secret agenda or hidden motives". The Southern bosses were clearly in an upbeat mood and ready to start changing the world in their own modest ways.



attempt any dramatics. His approach was low-key, sober and, in the end, he got most of the things he wanted. One of his principal aims was to use the G 15 Summit to air India's views on Kashmir. On this visit, Singh used a new approach to explain India's problems with Pakistan. He contrasted Indo-Pak relations with those with China, which he said were "complicated" but congenial today on account of the fact that neither government suspected the other of indulging in anything "underhand." He got this message across without being crass and, in the process, secured the support of two key Muslim nations, Indonesia and Malaysia. Both these countries, which also happen to be members of the influential Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC),

Later, Gujral was to apologise to Indian newsmen for not being able to meet them while at Kuala Lumpur. "The problem was that I was either meeting people, moving from one place to another or busy at the hotel," he said. "I would not like to boast, but I can assure you that we achieved our purpose," he concluded.

The other major objective of the visit was to iron out problems in Indo-Malaysian trade relations. As Montek Singh Ahluwalia told newsmen before arriving in Kuala Lumpur, India had an unfavourable trade balance with Malaysia. Last year, India imported Rs 541.7 crores worth of goods and services from Malaysia but could export only Rs 269.5 crores to that country. Traditionally, India has imported almost its total requirement

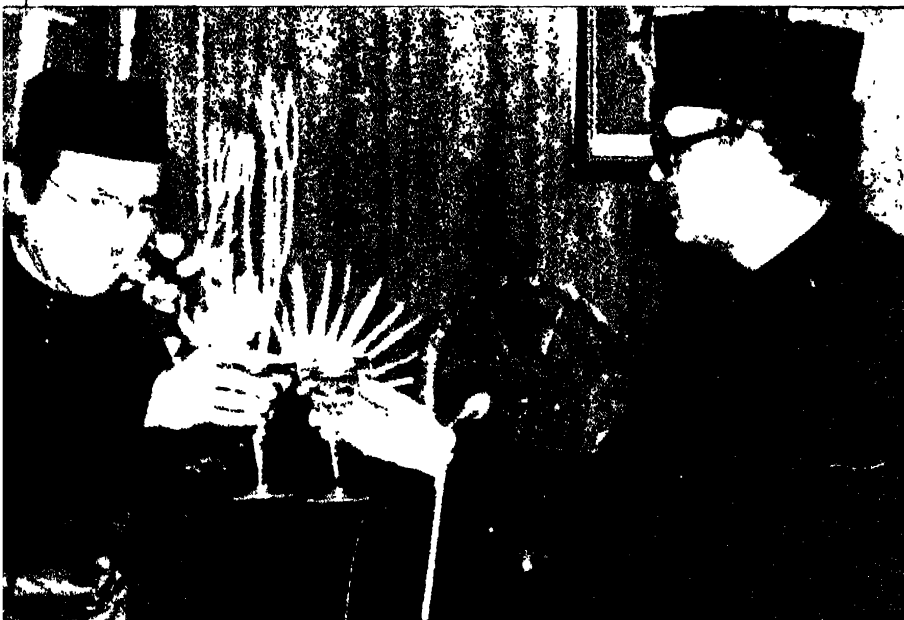
promised to explore the possibilities of buying more from India for feeding its own and the lucrative ASEAN market. India, on its part, has agreed to make added efforts, by improving the marketing and advertising of its consumer products, for Malaysia's competitive market.

During his bilateral talks with the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad, V.P. Singh assured his counterpart that India had no intentions of cutting back on trade. On the contrary, the Indian Prime Minister said that he did not mind the trade imbalance as long as the volume of trade between the two countries continued to expand and reach higher levels. In other words, the Indians suggested that they were prepared to buy more and more from Malaysia as long as Malaysia too made an effort to buy increasingly greater amounts from India. As a goodwill gesture, the Indian Prime Minister announced that more Malaysian students would be allowed to study medicine in India, that India would help in the establishment of a new medical faculty in Malaysia and that it would offer solar energy expertise to the University of Science at Penang.

V.P. Singh's schedule was, on the whole, relaxed. The closed sessions of the summit were generally brief—a total of seven and a half hours in three days—and more time was spent at informal meetings and banquets. The Prime Minister and his wife, along with other G-15 Summit leaders, also spent a night at the Awana retreat, a hill resort located 15 minutes flying time away from Kuala Lumpur.

All the while, the Prime Minister was in touch with New Delhi. And less than an hour after taking off from Kuala Lumpur, he joined newsmen in the aircraft to talk about the proposal for a 'national government'. The Kuala Lumpur break had clearly helped. For, Singh looked more refreshed and vivacious. "I can step down if it helps the nation. Issues, not personalities, are more important for the nation," he gushed. Singh laughed, reparteed and willingly answered questions at the last press conference on the aircraft. When he landed, it was 40 degrees and getting warmer. It was back to the hurly-burly of New Delhi politics. V.P. Singh cannot but have looked back with a slight wistfulness at his Malaysian sojourn. •

**Indranil Banerjee/Kuala Lumpur and on board the PM's aircraft**



**V.P. Singh with Malaysian PM Datuk Mohammad: hard bargaining**

accepted India's stand on Kashmir and supported India's view that its problems with Pakistan should be solved bilaterally and under the framework of the Shimla Agreement.

This was no mean achievement. For, Pakistan has been lobbying with Muslim and western countries in an effort to internationalise the Kashmir issue and has been insinuating that the problem could not be solved bilaterally. India has been trying to prove to the world that the facts are otherwise and that the Kashmir imbroglio is the result of Pakistan sponsoring terrorists in Kashmir. This was also the message that Indian external affairs minister I.K. Gujral conveyed to the heads of state, foreign ministers and foreign officials he met while in Malaysia.

of palm oil and tin from Malaysia, apart from substantial quantities of rubber. In contrast India sells machinery and odd consignments aimed at the 15 million-odd people of Indian origin residing in Malaysia. For many years, India had been trying to step up its project exports to Malaysia and one of the aims of this visit was to finalise contracts for building hydel projects and an HMT-aided training centre among other ventures.

The trip also provided an opportunity for some hard bargaining. The Indian delegation subtly threatened to cut back on palm oil imports from Malaysia and turn to Indonesia, which also produces large quantities of palm oil. In the end, the two sides appear to have compromised. Malaysia has



# A house divided

*The Raja and his ministers squabble—and governance takes a backseat*

**W**ith a Raja at the helm, court intrigues are only to be expected. And sure enough, the Indian government has never appeared more divided than it does today. Factionalism is rampant with everyone cheerfully planting stories against their foes. Or even, when the provocation is grave enough, issuing statements criticising government policy. Meetings of the Union Cabinet resemble nothing more than a free-for-all, with each man for himself and Devi Lal take the hindmost. No body dreams of asking the Prime Minister to intervene and restore order, for V.P. Singh is playing the same games as anyone else—though with a greater degree of manipulative finesse. And with every minister worth his portfolio at odds with his colleagues, it seems only a matter of time before the house the Raja built comes crashing down on his fur cap.

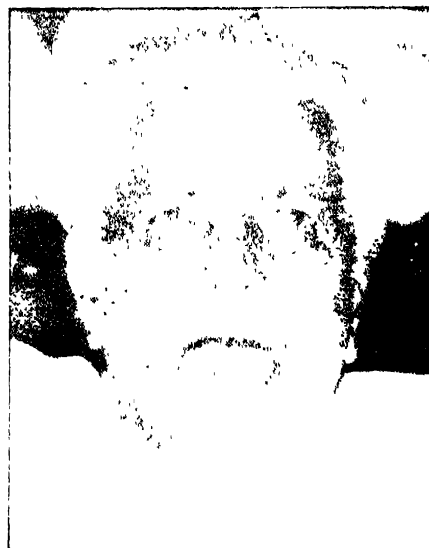
A quick round-up of the Dal government's factional quarrels: the Prime Minister and his deputy are at loggerheads with each other, on every issue of import, Om Prakash Chautala prominent among them. Of late, differences have even developed between commerce minister Arun Nehru and V.P. Singh, leading to the former keeping a very low profile. While the Tau and vice-chairman of the Planning Commission Ramakrishna Hegde make no secret of their dislike for each other, Ajit Singh has yet to forgive Hegde for the phone-tapping scandal. Nathu Ram Mudha harbours no love for the Chaudhary ever since the latter brandished his shoes at him during a Dal Parliamentary Board meeting. Home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed nurses a grouse against George Fernandes ever since he was handed over charge of Jammu and Kashmir. Nilamani Routray has already succeeded in reducing his minister of state, Maneka Gandhi to a cipher, and the lady has in a memorable one-liner, dubbed him a vegetable. The other Mrs Gandhi is also said to be upset with Arif Mohammad Khan. The current cease-fire between the Ajit Singh and Devi Lal camps notwithstanding, the Tau's protégé,

textile minister Sharad Yadav is still looking out for an opportunity to settle scores with the industry minister. Union minister for petroleum S. Gurupadaswamy refuses to even exchange words with Hegde, and food minister Mirdha can't stand the sight of his minister of state, Ram Pujan Patel.

On the whole, ministers are more anxious to teach their rivals a lesson than dispose of Government of India work.

Muzaffarabad, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Mahendra Singh Tikait addressed Devi Lal as Prime Minister. And none of the leaders in attendance, including such stalwarts as Ajit Singh and Chandra Shekhar raised any objections. Tikait also laid a foundation stone which had the Chaudhary down as PM, thus ensuring that later generations remembered him, and not the Raja, as the head of the Dal government.

The Raja, for his part, holds forth



**Devi Lal and V.P. Singh: a reconciliation seems impossible**

## V.P. SINGH VS DEVI LAL

The Chaudhary helped the Raja on to the gaddi, with a little white lie. But things have deteriorated with amazing rapidity since then. V.P. Singh may have managed to get Chautala off his back, but he has earned the implacable ire of his deputy in the process. The Tau has gone on the record, saying that if the Prime Minister can betray his colleague, he can, all too easily, betray the nation. And as he tours the country in his nifty little "plane" he regales newsmen with anti-Raja stories. These accounts generally end with the reiteration of the fact that he (Devi Lal) made V.P. Singh the Prime Minister.

His supporters go even further, no doubt, with the Chaudhary's blessings. Recently, at a function held in

on Lal's dis, but only (true to his discreet image) off the record. Singh's advisors are also working actively to rid the Cabinet of the Tau. Soon after the political affairs committee decided to dump Chautala, a few ministers suggested that the PM should now work on removing the Chaudhary. And if matters continue to deteriorate, the Raja may have no way out but to exercise this option.

## V.P. SINGH VS AJIT SINGH

My enemy's enemy is my friend. This reasoning seems to work with Ajit Singh, who has taken to courting the Tau, now that he has fallen out with V.P. Singh. And if the Raja has lost a powerful ally (even if he is the flip-flop man of the Dal) he has only himself to blame. The Prime Minister





**V.P. Singh and Ajit Singh: the Raja has lost a powerful ally**

has ditched the industry minister not on one occasion but thrice. First, VPS asked Ajit Singh to fly to Lucknow and contest for the UP chief ministership. He (the Raja) would ensure that Chaudhary Charan Singh's son was supported by the majority of the legislators. Taking the PM at his word, Ajit Singh went to the Uttar Pradesh capital. But the Raja had a change of heart in the meantime and asked the legislators to vote against Singh.

Then again, Ajit Singh appointed Ram Pujan Patel the chief of the UP unit of the party after consulting the Prime Minister. But once chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav found fault with this appointment, V.P. Singh promptly dissociated himself from the move. The truth was out, however, when Ajit Singh and Yadav compared notes after a few months.

Next, when the Meham controversy was dominating newspaper headlines, the Prime Minister asked Ajit Singh to visit Meham. The latter agreed only too readily. But no sooner had the Chaudhary let out a bellow of anger that V.P. Singh (in a letter to his deputy) claimed that he had advised the industry minister *against* the visit.

To add to Singh's displeasure, came the Raja's decision to appoint a minister of state (Srikant Jena) in his ministry, though most Cabinet members considered close to the PM handle their portfolios on their own. Since the Raja had proved totally unreliable, Ajit Singh turned to the Tau instead. Their new-found closeness was only too evident when they undertook a joint tour of Western UP, around the time of Chaudhary Charan Singh's death anniversary. Both travelled on the same helicopter and addressed

meetings from the same platform, with their supporters keeping up a constant refrain that the two should live like father and son.

Of late, Ajit Singh also seems to have come closer to commerce minister Arun Nehru. And this can only add to the Raja's troubles.

#### V.P. SINGH VS ARUN NEHRU

When the Raja walked out of the Congress government to form the Jan Morcha and plot Rajiv's downfall, Arun Nehru was one of his closest lieutenants. But hardly had the Dal government hit its stride (only in a manner of speaking) that V.P. Singh began doubting where his commerce minister's loyalties *really* lay. Several events transpired to convince the PM

#### Arun Nehru and V.P. Singh: friends no longer



that Nehru was attempting to affect a reconciliation with his cousin Rajiv.

V.P. Singh put his Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande on the job, to ascertain the truth of the matter. Pande, in turn, recruited a senior IAS officer, who spoke to the sister of a leading industrialist in the course of his investigations. She was told that if her brother ensured that Rajiv Gandhi called Nehru on the phone, there would be no further harassment by the Directorate of Enforcement. (This industrialist is close to both Gandhi and Nehru.) The brother refused and a couple of days later his house was raided while he was undergoing heart surgery.

The Raja has also planted his own men in the commerce minister's realm. Secretary, commerce, S.P. Shukla is a V.P. Singh man, as is the chairman of the Trading Corporation S.V.S. Raghavan.

Nehru has reacted to this by adopting an even lower profile than usual. But as VPS knows all too well a silent Nehru is a dangerous man too.

#### DEVI LAL VS RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

When Om Prakash Chautala continued in office even after the Meham poll was countermanded the second time round, Planning Commission member L.C. Jain resigned in disgust. And then, withdrew the resignation as soon as the Tau's eldest-born "bowed to the party directive" and quit the Haryana chief ministership. The deputy PM extracted due revenge on Jain by sending members of the infamous Green brigade over to Yojana Bhavan, to mutilate the member's name-







**Devi Lal and R.K. Hegde: Meham was the last straw**

He and ransack his office. But it was vice-chairman Planning Commission, R K Hegde, who had prevailed upon Jain to rejoin. Hegde had also issued a statement to the effect that if Chautala's resignation hadn't come when it did, he too would have resigned from the Planning Commission. This was enough to make Hegde public enemy number one in the eyes of Lal.

He began the campaign by asking for Hegde's resignation. When that didn't quite work out, Lal scuttled his plans of leading a party delegation to China.

#### **AJIT SINGH VS RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE**

Their quarrel goes back to the days when Ajit Singh, then interim presi-

dent of the Janata Party, had launched a crusade against Karnataka chief minister Hegde. The now-infamous telephone tapping scandal broke when Hegde released transcripts of Ajit Singh's conversations with H D Deve Gowda to *Indian Express* editor Arun Shourie, in an attempt to vindicate his position. The ruse backfired, but that is another story.

Hegde believes that Ajit Singh is in league with his arch-enemy Subramaniam Swamy, and that he was responsible for inducing Swamy in the Rajya Sabha. Singh also extended his support to S R Bommai in the election to the post of Dal president. And Hegde, rabidly anti-Bommai as he is, could hardly have appreciated the move.

**R.K. Hegde and Ajit Singh: It began with the telephone-tapping**



#### **GEORGE FERNANDES VS MUFTI SAYEED**

George Fernandes may have succeeded in getting Jagmohan removed from the governorship of Jammu and Kashmir, but Mufti Mohammad Sayeed managed to evict Fernandes from J&K affairs as well.

The railway minister had begun complaining about the Mufti ever since he was handed special charge of Kashmir. Fernandes reportedly accused Sayeed of having links with the terrorists, and even handed over some cassettes to the Prime Minister which confirmed the charge. Unconfirmed rumours also have it that Fernandes was the brain behind the recent signature campaign against the home minister.

Sayeed, too, made no secret of his animosity toward Fernandes, openly criticising his policy of going soft on the extremists and opening a dialogue with them. Reports have it that the Mufti is behind the official denial of



#### **George Fernandes and Mufti Mohammad: squabbling over Kashmir**

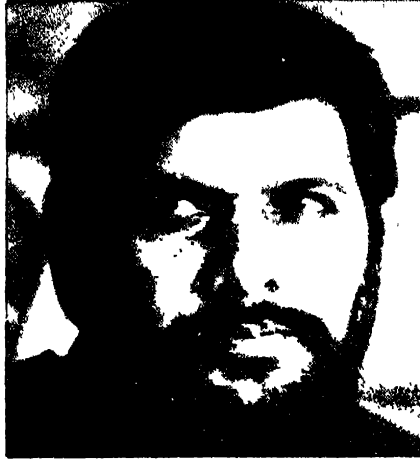
the Fernandes statement which mentioned talks with Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) leader, Amanullah Khan.

But the Fernandes camp hasn't been sitting idle either. Supporters of the railway minister are busy trying to convince the Raja that if George has been kept out of Kashmir, the Mufti should be removed from the scene as well.

#### **SHARAD YADAV VS AJIT SINGH**

When the Lok Dal split, Yadav and Singh found themselves in opposing ranks. Even now, when they are both leading leaders of the Janata Dal, old enmities persist, with the duo fighting each other on all issues, including ticket distribution. During Laloo Prasad Yadav's election to the post of Bihar CM, the heated exchanges between Sharad Yadav and Ajit Singh had party workers with weak hearts.



**Ajit Singh and Sharad Yadav: In opposing ranks**

scurrying for cover

Since the industry and the textile and food processing ministries are closely allied, this quarrel means that several proposals are lying in limbo because of the communication gap between the ministers. At present commerce minister Nehru is attempting to affect a reconciliation. But the chances of success are pretty remote

**DEVI LAL VS NATHURAM MIRDHA**

The clash of these Jats once had the Janata Dal parliamentary board in thrall, with both men brandishing *chappals* at one another. This during the run-up to the Rajasthan Assembly

**Devi Lal and Nathuram Mirdha: clash of the Jats**

elections, when both leaders wanted the list of candidates to be weighed down by their supporters. Soon after Devi Lal lobbied extensively for his grandson Abhay Singh to be made a minister in the Rajasthan Cabinet, but Mirdha shot down this proposal as well

Result, the two men are no longer on talking terms, and abuse each other at private gatherings. At Cabinet meetings they criticise each others proposals, often without even understanding the issues at stake

**MANEKA GANDHI VS NILAMANI ROUTRAY**

Nilamani Routray may appear to have fixed his minister of state Maneka Gandhi (see story on page 22), but the battle is far from over

Maneka, well aware that she owes her ouster, at least partly, to the industrial lobby (the lady had cancelled the licenses of 23 distilleries, and held up several proposals of setting up new units because environmental safeguards had not been implemented) is not likely to give up without a fight

And in the ensuing struggle she may well have to take on Arun Nehru as well. Apparently, he doesn't want any

**Routray and Maneka Gandhi: round one to Routray**

Gandhi to flourish in politics and manoeuvred the situation so that Maneka's green dream was shattered

**RAM BILAS PASWAN VS RAM DHAN**

Union minister of labour and welfare Ram Bilas Paswan was recently faced with an embarrassing situation in Parliament. When Paswan introduced a Bill in the House, seeking to give statute powers to the scheduled caste/scheduled tribes commission, the chairman of the commission, Ram

Dhan moved an amendment to the Bill

Instantly, several ministers zeroed in on Ram Dhan (who has been assigned Cabinet rank) asking him to desist. But the agitated member was beyond reason, and engaged Paswan in a heated argument, which had the Congress(I) benches in ecstasy

It was only on Chandra Shekhar's bidding that Ram Dhan withdrew his amendment

**MANEKA GANDHI VS ARIF MOHAMMAD**

It all began when Maneka got into a fight with UP forest minister Aslam Sher Khan because forest officials of the state weren't obeying her commands. The green minister believes that Arif Mohammad Khan (and by extension Arun Nehru) are encouraging Aslam Sher Khan and has therefore, mounted a campaign against the energy and civil aviation minister

Though Arif continues to protest his innocence,

**T**he list of conflicts is endless. R K Hegde tries his best to keep S Gurupadaswamy out of the Cabinet, on the grounds that the party would be best served if he was appointed president of the Karnataka Dal unit. In his turn, Gurupadaswamy supports the candidature of S R Bommar for the party presidency, well aware that Hegde can't stand the man. Nathuram Mirdha comes into conflict with Ram Pujan Patel, his minister of state, whom he accuses of insubordination.

Infighting is rampant in the ranks of the bureaucracy as well. The Raja's protégé Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande is at loggerheads with home secretary Naresh Chandra, who owes allegiance to the Arun Nehru-Mufti Mohammad Sayeed camp. The two clashed over the appointment of the Punjab Governor. While Pande was in favour of former naval chief Admiral Tahlani, Naresh Chandra insisted on P K Kaul. The home secretary got his minister to okay his proposal, and even got clearance from the Prime Minister. Ultimately Kaul refused to go

But, if the Raja and his ministers don't get on with the task of governing—instead of concentrating on pulling the rug from under the next man's feet—the Dal government itself may be gone. And soon. •

**Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi**



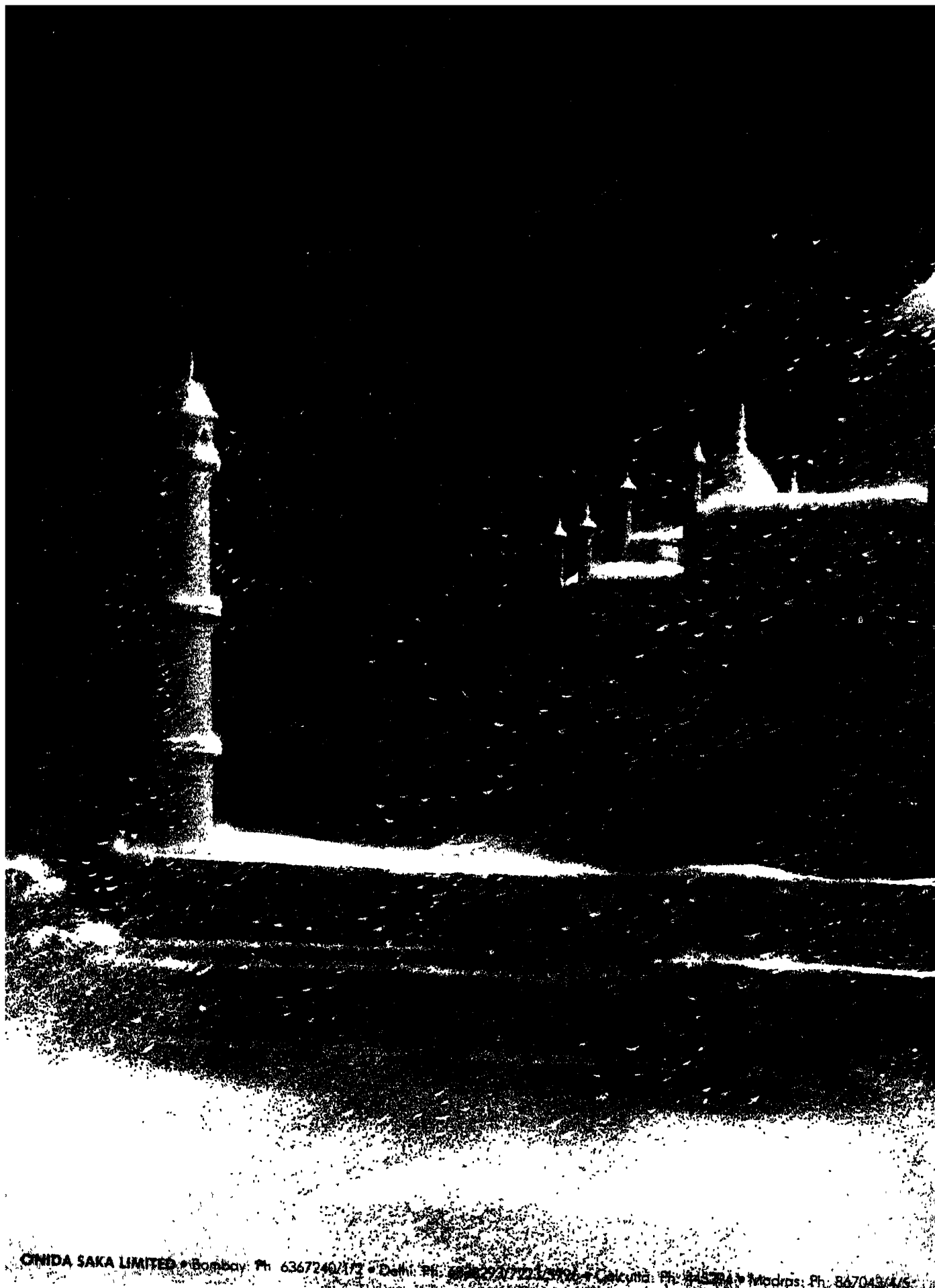
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London say to the Skypak Man?*

*"Your wax statue could look  
splendid! But would anyone  
ever recognize you in a static  
posture?"*



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# Dreams die first

*Green minister  
Maneka Gandhi is  
divested of all real  
powers*

It could well mark the end of Maneka Gandhi's green dream. The young and sprightly lady who joined the Union Cabinet last December with a lot of hope and created ripples with her unconventional ways and brash manners, suddenly finds herself out of favour with her seniors. The day Prime Minister V.P. Singh appointed Nilamani Routray as a minister in the department of environment and forests, it was amply clear that the days of Maneka—she is a minister of state in the same ministry—were numbered. But no one expected that Routray would divest his junior of practically all powers.

It was a clean, swift operation. The environment minister's order came on the night of 31 May, when the Prime Minister was away in Malaysia. The cryptic circular, issued under Rule 3 of the Government of India (transaction of business rules), 1961, said: "In supercession of all previous orders on the subject...minister for environment and forests has, however, with immediate effect, limited the cases to be disposed of by Mrs Gandhi to 17 heads."

Thus, in one stroke, all important ministry subjects—the proposed new forest policy, the national wasteland development board, environment appraisal and clearance of major projects and the national fund for afforestation—were taken away from Maneka, who, despite her loud mouth, is undisputably a committed environmentalist.



What was left to Maneka were: charge of the Delhi zoo, the responsibility of depolluting Delhi, greening of Haryana, and the administration of water and air pollution acts. Also included were clerical chores like answering questions in the Rajya Sabha and granting study leave to ministry officials.

As things stand, Maneka Gandhi has been left with virtually nothing—depolluting Delhi ultimately being the responsibility of the chief secretary of the Delhi administration and greening of Haryana, the task of the chief minister of the state. Moreover, the three water and air pollution acts will become redundant once the Environment Protection Act comes into effect and the National Zoo Authority, for which she will ultimately be responsible, is yet to be established.

Leaving the minister of state with the bare mundane and the routine is seen as a logical culmination of a move which first began with Nilamani Routray coming in as Union minister. Earlier, Maneka had a virtual *carte blanche* in running the environment ministry with only a very busy Prime Minister doing the customary supervising. Routray's induction into the ministry was, therefore, seen as a move to cut her down to size.

However, Routray had a reputation of being an ineffectual, weak minister who had done nothing really worthwhile in his previous post as health minister. And the already strained relations between the two were made worse when an enraged Maneka said in a newspaper interview that she would chew up her senior and that he was a vegetable anyway.

**T**here are other factors that have made Maneka extremely unpopular. The many toes she had stepped upon on her way to fulfilling her commitment to preserve the environment, for instance. Or even the many influential people she rubbed the wrong way in her haste to prove her point. She spared no effort to give her defunct ministry a definite shape, sending terse summons to senior ministers. But then there was no doubt that she was overdoing it a bit and the fallout was only inevitable.

"Her being stripped of powers was only a matter of time. With the number of people she had antagonised, this only had to happen," said an environmental activist, adding that Routray's circular was an obvious attempt to curb her influence. The

obvious conclusion—that the powerful industrialist-contractor lobby used its influence in the government to displace an energetic and concerned minister who relentlessly pursued a rigid afforestation and pollution policy, refusing to sanction forest land for industrial purposes and penalising industries for violating pollution control laws.

The tanneries near Kanpur, for



Environment minister  
Nilamani Routray

## **The day Prime Minister V.P. Singh appointed Nilamani Routray as minister in the department of environment and forests, it was amply clear that the days of Maneka Gandhi were numbered**

instance, spewing out poisonous effluents into the Ganga for decades, were told to instal treatment plants with the threat that their electricity supply would be cut off. And an irate businessman in Uttar Pradesh said that her decision to ban the export of wild birds is going to cost him Rs 20 lakh every year.

On a consistent collision course with "vested interests", Maneka has also been refusing to sanction forest land

for the rehabilitation of displaced villagers of the Narmada dam in Maharashtra. As a result, the state government now finds itself in a quandary, unable to formulate any proper rehabilitation plans. "There is a stalemate now with the central government's repeated refusal to give clearance to the state government's plans," said a member of Kalpvriksh, an environmental group in Delhi. In fact, Maneka has said, in a written question in Parliament, that the ministry will make no move towards the construction of the dam till the conditions imposed by it were refilled.

**O**pinion, however, is divided on whether Maneka could do something worthwhile in the environment ministry. Despite her commitment, she could do absolutely nothing on the two major issues confronting the country today—the multi-crore Tehri and Narmada dams. The only effective moves being the fact that she has placed her opposition to these two projects on record.

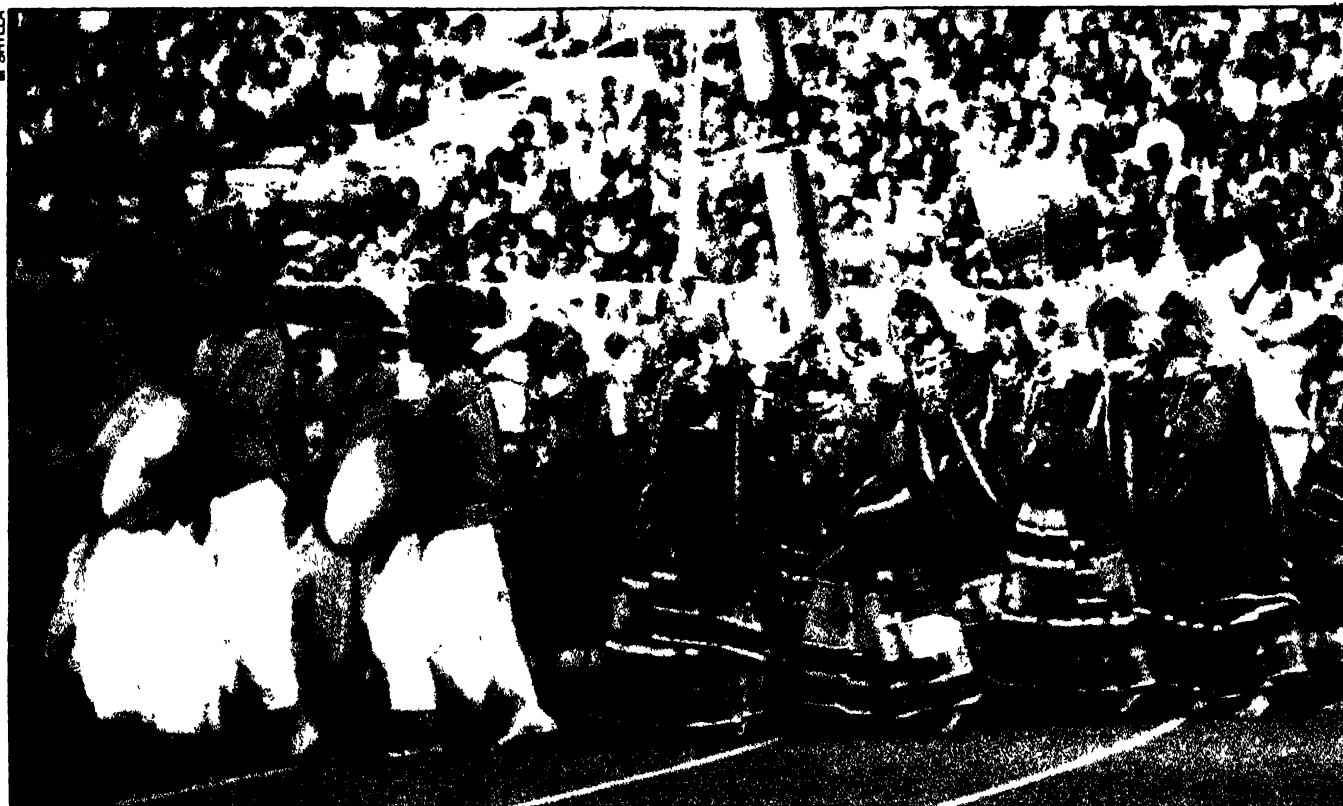
On other minor issues, however, she has been most vocal. For instance, rescuing a bear from his keepers' custody on grounds that the animal was being ill-treated. Or pulling up an official in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) for being unsuccessful in winning the confidence of the people, rushing to help when a stray dog is injured and making periodic visits to the zoo. In fact, according to some, she has been more visible than is necessary, embroiling herself in unnecessary controversies, in the process. (While bird-keepers are planning to go to the Delhi Court against the environment ministry, the keepers of Munna the bear have already filed a case in the Supreme Court.)

"Whatever be her faults—her failures to make a difference where it really mattered—the point is that for the first time we have a minister who really cares about the environment and about animals. That, in itself, is a big thing," says an environmentalist, adding that Routray's move is definitely not welcome.

However grave the provocation may have been, Maneka, contrary to the expectation that she would, in her usual impetuous way, resign immediately, has decided to play it cool. "I have got the Delhi zoo and I am going to make it the best in the country," she said stoically. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**





# The carnival is over

*Popularising India's heritage through festivals and Ustavs is out—but the Raja offers no alternative either*

**I**f Rajiv Gandhi's Raj was one big cultural *tamasha* from start to finish, the present government is too busy singing dirges for the demise of these un-savoury binges to formulate a meaningful policy of its own. It took the Dal government five months to decide that the human resource development (HRD) portfolio was significant enough to warrant a separate minister of state. Then, there was talk of the HRD ministry being merged with the information and broadcasting ministry, mainly because the I&B minister liked the idea of presiding over cultural functions. And felt that if he controlled cinema, Doordarshan and the information set-up, why not culture? But, as the erstwhile uncrowned Czarina of culture, Pupul Jayakar, pointed out, "Does that mean that they (the present government) perceive culture as merely song and dance?"

The main aim of a comprehensive cultural policy, according to Dr Laxmi Sihare, director-general of New Delhi's National Museum, "is to create an environment and conditions which facilitate creative pursuits by artists and gifted intellectuals", the strengthening and building of institutions like museums, libraries, academies, and the organisation of art seminars. And to club culture with information and broadcasting would be suicidal, is the almost unanimous opinion of those actively involved in the field. Says Sihare: "Whereas information is short-lived, and has tendency to satisfy the immediate need, culture is absorbed through a process of osmosis, which could take decades, even centuries. You cannot tackle culture with the news media approach."

So, did the Rajiv government for all its razzmatazz, contribute effectively to the dissemination of culture? Did the lavish Festivals of India and Apna

Ustavs serve a purpose besides that of being an ostentatious advertisement for the Congress(I)? Apparently, yes. "If culture was sprinting during the earlier regime, today it has come to a standstill," comments a senior official in the culture department. Adds another: "Whether you criticise or praise Rajiv Gandhi's decisions, at least he took them promptly. Despite the Prime Minister holding the HRD portfolio himself until May, files take as long as four months to clear and there is a terrible delay in the implementation of crucial programmes. Actions might lead to mistakes, but keeps the lifeline vibrant. Inaction leads to a stalemate, and the rot sets in."

If the National Front's manifesto is anything to go by, however, it is definitely favourably inclined to the encouragement of culture. The document makes clear that the Front would not promote "sarkari culture with great





**Festival of India in U S S R: an image-promotion jamboree?**

fanfare" as the previous government had been doing and that "expensive and ostentatious centrally-sponsored festivals and synthetic *utsavs* would be abandoned in favour of a multitude of local initiatives and talents". While recognising that "true people's culture can flourish only through the encouragement of, and respect for, different cultural identities and their manifestations", the National Front government promised to "promote classical and folk traditions in arts, crafts, music, theatre, dance, etc., and encourage them through traditional institutions and schools, which evolved and sustained them for hundreds of years".

**B**ut well-meaning promises are one thing and the ability to deliver quite another. And the government's good intentions have been smothered by indecision and indifference where the sphere of culture is concerned—much as happened earlier with Door-darshan autonomy. "The cultural scene today is dead, dull, and dreary," says a senior ministry source. "The government is more interested in consolidating its position and in the Par-



**Pupul Jayakar:** "Does the present government perceive culture as merely song and dance?"



**Jaya Bhattacharya:** "All those who found the festivals and Utsavs a bit much should be thankful that this government's view on culture is that people should have their own view"



**Dr L.P. Saksena:** "Culture is absorbed through a process of osmosis, which could take decades, even centuries. You cannot tackle culture with the news-media approach"

liament proceedings, than in disseminating art and culture to the millions."

Rajiv Gandhi's predilections for holding Festivals of India and Apna Utsavs was regarded as either a manifestation of his arty upbringing or a carefully-orchestrated advertisement campaign for the Congress(I). So, does the present cultural ennui reflect the nonchalance of the Raja? Most people seem to agree with this perception. "When V.P. Singh became Prime Minister, we were told he is a poet, a painter and a photographer, and would be genuinely interested in culture," says the head of a prestigious cultural institution. "But obviously he finds he has more important things to attend to than files on culture. This stalemate is very frustrating."

"The present government is so busy demolishing what the Congress Raj established, that they are taking no new initiatives," complains a Congress(I) functionary. Old-timers in the field who have witnessed the evolution of India's cultural policy since Jawaharlal Nehru's days, point out that each Prime Minister has traditionally identified his or her chosen culture queen or king, even if it did amount to favouritism and infighting.

Nehru had Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Badruddin Tyabji, Mrs Gandhi relied on Pupul Jayakar, Usha Bhagat and Sharada Prasad. Behind the scenes, were committed culture pundits who wielded some influence in the corridors of power, such as theatre director Ebrahim Alkazi and Laxmi Sihare, former director of the National Gallery of Modern Art and current head of the National Museum. "In the present set-up, we have no one person that we can rely upon to provide the crucial conduit to those in power," complains a reputed official of a cultural institution. "We had hoped that Gujral, with his experience of, and interest in, culture, would be such a person, but he has his hands full. The government should quickly identify such people. It's not that they don't exist."

"The present government's nonchalance is no excuse to let the Congress(I) off the hook for the excesses they committed in the name of culture," says an official involved in the Festivals of India. "You can't use culture as a handmaiden for a particular political image, once you start politicising culture, there's trouble."

Not to mention the colossal expense incurred to project the supposedly best face of Indian culture abroad.





RAJESH SARAI

**Rajiv's predilection for festivals and Utsavs was regarded as a manifestation of his arty upbringing. So is the present culture ennui a reflection of the Raja's attitude?**

The Festivals of India cost the country Rs 25 crores in the USSR, Rs 11-12 crores each in the USA and France, Rs 120 crores in the UK and Rs 36 crores in Japan (the host countries contributed identical sums). Then, there was the month-long Japanese festival in India, which entailed an expenditure of Rs 50 lakhs. The Indian festival in Sweden cost Rs 75 lakhs, and an estimated Rs 45 crores will go into the forthcoming festival in Germany.

**C**ontrary to popular belief, it was not Rajiv Gandhi but his mother Indira who initiated the move to hold festivals abroad. "The brief Mrs Gandhi gave me was very clear," recalls Pupul Jayakar, "The minds of world leaders were closing in and people to people contact was very necessary."

Jayakar dismisses allegations that the nation's scarce resources were squandered on these international image-promotion jamborees. "All this talk of vast sums of foreign exchange being spent is just not true," she says forcefully. "I am told that tourism

from these countries to India has gone up by 40 per cent annually. And this is not a one-time gain." But a senior official involved with the festivals disagrees: "There is no way we can determine how much the Festivals of India have contributed to tourism."

Jayakar insists, however, that it is important to appreciate that after a thousand years, interest in Indian culture has been revived in the countries where the festivals were held. She says "A very senior ambassador from one of these countries told me that festivals did more than what 10 years of diplomacy could have done to establish India in the minds of people. We are the pioneers, other countries are planning similar events; you simply don't understand the implications if you are putting us down."

While, admitting her uncertainty as to what shape the Dal government will give to the culture policy, Jayakar concedes that the Congress regime concentrated too much on the performing arts, at the expense of strengthening and building cultural institu-

tions. Much more money needs to be spent on training people in the area of management of institutions such as museums, libraries and art education academies. "We have, for example," says Jayakar, "only one conservation laboratory in Lucknow for books, photographs and art objects which is just not enough."

Jaya Jaitly, long involved in the crafts and handloom sectors, defends the present government's lack of a culture policy, saying: "All those who found the festivals and Utsavs a bit much should be thankful that this government's view on culture is that people should have their own view."

**B**ut a democratic cultural policy is one thing, the virtual absence of any direction is quite another. While certain institutions such as the National Museum and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR's director-general, Veena Sikri, says she perceives very little difference between the two governments' policies, except that things are more low-key), continue to do commendable work, the cultural effort, as a whole, remains disorganised.

Sources in the HRD ministry are hopeful that things will change in the near future, with the appointment of Chimanbhai Patel as minister of state. But most culture vultures remain a little sceptical. Says one "We don't doubt that Patel, like V P. Singh, has the best of intentions, but it is too early to say whether his appointment will have any significant impact on the ministry."

So, what needs to be done? Jaitly has her own views on the matter: "There should be an enlightened minister and a progressive policy in which it is understood that the prerequisite for cultural forms to flourish is to have contented people. The shifting of such an amorphous and abstract subject from one ministry to another hardly makes a difference."

Dr Laxmi Sihare maintains: "Culture is such a vital subject that no political party, irrespective of differences in their ideology can afford to ignore it. As far as possible, some sort of consensus should be evolved." He suggests that all ministries share the responsibility of evolving common programmes for the propagation of culture.

For, the cultural ship will remain anchorless and adrift unless the powers that be appoint their new messiahs. •

**Shiraz Siddiqui/New Delhi**

**Apna Utsav: the best face of Indian culture?**



CNS



# Summit of the poor

*The G-15 takes off, but will its voice be heard?*



G-15, which had its maiden meeting at Kuala Lumpur at the beginning of June, is the poor nations' answer to G-7, the most exclusive club of the rich of the world, all of them white, with the exception of Japan, which has traditionally been treated as a honorary white nation however. The letter G in both cases stands for group.

But, like the chasm that separates the rich and the poor both nationally and internationally, there is a significant difference between the two groups. G-7 is both the privileged club in its entirety and its executive arm. G-15, now in the process of taking shape, can at best be a standing committee of the large body of poor nations which continues to be called G-77, although, its membership has already shot up to more than 120.

The task of G-15 is unenviable. It is to put back some life and pep into the North-South negotiations for a new and just international economic order, which have turned into a classic case of the dialogue of the deaf. Ironically, the end of the cold war and the concomitant superpower detente have reinforced the resolve of the rich to impose their will on the rest of the world as far as the management of the global economy is concerned. Witness the big stick of the Super-301 the United States is wielding against those refusing to fall in line and, even more significantly, speeches by James Baker, the US secretary of state, proclaiming that NATO and even the UN system would be used for among other things, ensuring uninterrupted supply of raw materials to industrialised nations in need of them.

Against this background, the Kuala Lumpur confabulations did produce some useful results. Most notably a realisation of the primacy of the task to see to it that the Uruguay round of talks under GATT are not allowed to be converted into an opportunity for the rich to dictate to the poor. This however, would require that the poor

collectively inveighing against the rich exploiters do not individually try to kowtow to their benefactors, actual or potential, and enter into opportunistic bilateral deals. Of this, alas, there is yet no guarantee.

The vexed question of South-South cooperation, on which there has been too much talk and too little action, was also taken up by the leaders assembled in the Malaysian capital, a little more realistically than before. A few specific projects, inevitably modest, have been thought of. The data

vulnerable are the vocal "warriors" of the Third World. The Mexican President made no bones about his unwillingness to attend. But the performance of the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, was astonishing. He said he very much wanted to be at Kuala Lumpur but was unable to do so because, as host to the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the Arab League, he must stay in Cairo to be available to nations anxious to consult him. Having said this, he left for Damascus and then embarked on a



**Prime Minister V.P. Singh (second from left) with the Malaysian PM, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at Kuala Lumpur**

bank on investment, trade and technology—so that the poor know what they can get from one another—should also help.

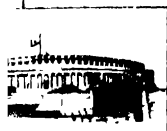
However, all this does not add up to the kind of "grant achievement" that is being claimed in the self-congratulatory propaganda blitz in not only this country but also by some other participants. On the contrary, there are some negative features of the meet in Malaysia which cannot be brushed under the carpet.

In the first place, heads of state of a third of the 15 nations comprising the new grouping simply failed to turn up. A few, like the President of Peru, who faces a second round of voting soon, may have had good reason to stay at home. But several others seem to have developed cold feet because of Western pressure which only shows how

wider tour of places as far afield as Beijing and London. This has robbed the G-15 deliberations of much of their clout, and there is no use pretending otherwise.

Secondly—and more importantly—the Kuala Lumpur summit appointed only a three-member steering committee of G-15 from which India has been conspicuously excluded. What kind of weight can such a steering committee have? In any case, India's exclusion from it, voluntary or otherwise, is puzzling. Especially, when it is remembered that the very formation of G-15, at the NAM summit at Belgrade last year, was the result of a powerful Indian initiative taken by Rajiv Gandhi. Nor is it any secret that the man behind the idea, who also did much of the spadework for the meeting in Malaysia, is Muchkund Dubey, the new foreign secretary. ●





# WOULD A NATIONAL

*And why has V.P. Singh thought of it now?*

**A**ir India VVIP flight number AI 001 had taken off from Kuala Lumpur seat belts had long been unfastened, the newsmen on board had just finished tucking into a sumptuous breakfast and were ordering their first Baccardis and Martinis when the Prime Minister's corpulent press adviser, Prem Shankar Jha, announced that Vishwanath Pratap Singh would like to talk to them informally. "It is going to be a strictly off-the-record conversation, no quoting, no Doordarshan, please," he insisted. The Prime Minister walked in looking positively refreshed after his five days in Malaysia and, almost at once, plunged into the subject of deputy prime minister Devi Lal and the mounting pressures on his prime ministership. V.P. Singh seemed unusually spirited that morning. And when he sensed that the newsmen were appreciating the tenor of his remarks, the Prime Minister declared that he could be quoted. "Nothing is off the record!" he exclaimed. And as the TV cameras switched on their powerful lights, the Prime Minister went on to make one of the most dramatic political announcements in recent times.

What the Prime Minister let drop was the idea of a 'national government'. The suggestion left the newsmen present momentarily stunned before they reached for their pens to scribble down the quotes that they knew would make frontpage headlines across the

country. Here was an 'Opposition' Prime Minister openly declaring that he "favoured" the idea of a government that would be made up of all political parties, including Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I). The concept was mind-boggling.

Not only that, V.P. Singh was even saying that he was prepared to step down for the "bigger cause of the formation of a national government". For a moment, it seemed to the newsmen that this was the end. Vishwanath Pratap Singh's great crusade against Rajiv Gandhi had ended in a surrender. For, a national government implied that the political party with the

greatest number of MPs in the Lok Sabha, which happens to be the Congress(I), would get the largest representation in a national government Cabinet and would be eminently positioned to select a Prime Minister from within its own ranks.

V.P. Singh further confounded the journalists by suggesting that he had nothing personal against Rajiv Gandhi. The Prime Minister adopted his old line about "value-based politics" and how individuals on their own are not material: "If Rajiv Gandhi comes, what is wrong or if V.P. Singh goes, what does it matter?" He went on to clarify that it was not his life's ambition to hound any one person. "From

where Rajiv Gandhi had to be removed, he has already been removed," said the Raja. "If the Congress wants him to be its president, it is perfectly all right with me."

The sentiments about the nation being above personalities might sound very well, but V.P. Singh's sudden magnanimity towards Rajiv Gandhi could not but be astounding. For, Singh, after his expulsion from the Congress(I) three years ago, had single-mindedly campaigned against Rajiv Gandhi, making him out to be corrupt, incompetent and ever-ready to sell the country short. The *raison d'être* of Singh becoming Prime Minister, after establishing himself as a rallying point for all anti-Congress(I) forces, was his anti-Rajiv Gandhi stance. Even after coming to power, his government had filed First Information Reports (FIRs) on the Bofors



RAJIV GANDHI



V.P. SINGH



L.K. ADVANI



JYOTI BASU



# GOVERNMENT WORK?

and HDW deals in an effort to pin down Rajiv Gandhi. Nothing, consequently, could be more amazing than Singh's unexpected volte-face.

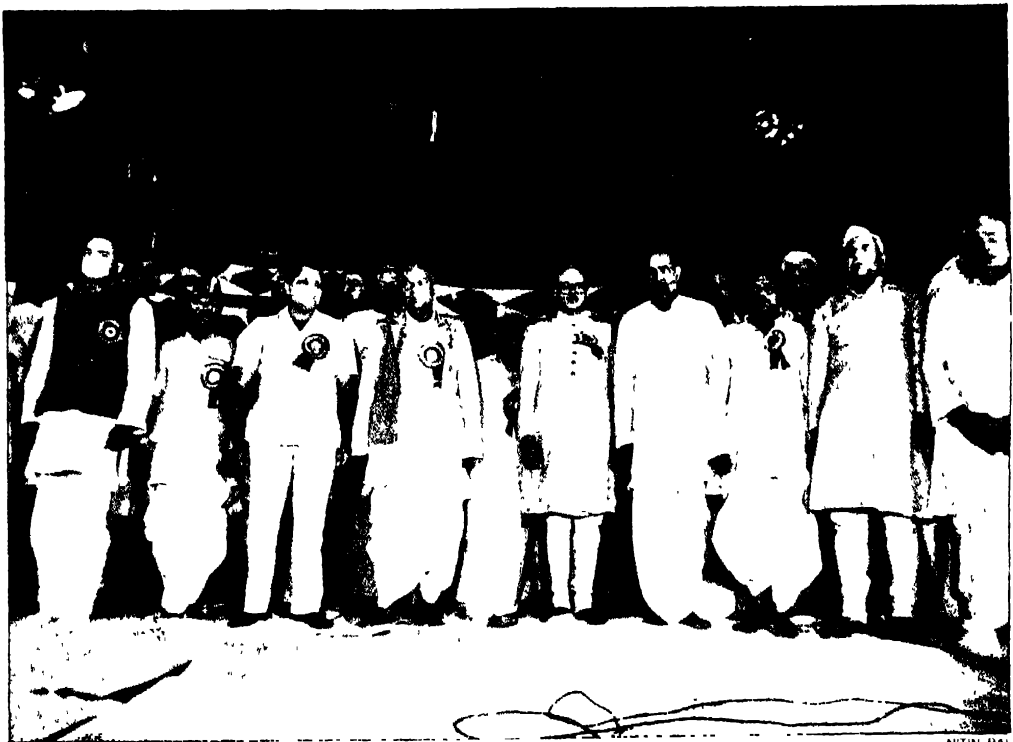
The very notion of a 'national government' was outlandish. Yet, the Prime Minister seemed to believe that the bizarre idea could work, that many of the country's problems could be sorted out faster by such a government. Besides, opined Singh, why not try new approaches?

But could a patchwork government made up of ministers drawn from diverse political parties as the Congress(I), the Janata Dal, the BJP and the left ever work effectively? What on earth would happen to the concept of a parliamentary Opposition? Could there be a situation where Rajiv Gandhi is once again Prime Minister and V.P. Singh just another Cabinet minister, perhaps even in charge of finance? No matter which way one looked at it, the 'national government' concept seemed not just unworkable, but ludicrous as well. Virtually every political party and faction leader vehemently denounced the idea. Politicians across the ideological spectrum unitedly expressed shock and incredulity. The country was dazed. Things, as in *Alice In Wonderland*, were getting curiously and curiously. And before the dust could settle over the entire controversy, the question canner politicians and Intelligence Bureau (IB) analysts were asking was, what prompted the Prime Minister to raise the 'national government' issue? Was he serious? Or was it the year's biggest political bluff?

**T**his intriguing conundrum can only be answered in terms of the crisis within the ruling National Front. The Prime Minister, by suggesting an

alternative form of government, was also clearly admitting that the existing set-up was not ideal. He was hinting that it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to function effectively. On the record, however, Singh continued to defend his government and claim that it had proved effective. He insisted that far from being a failure, his government had succeeded in passing a number of new enactments in Parlia-

ment and had begun implementing most of its poll promises. He even argued that the pressure from the deputy prime minister was a good thing in that it kept the government on its toes. "If the Prime Minister and the government are under threat, it is good for the health of the government," he said. "The Congress(I) government was a stable one, but look what it did to the country."



NITIN HAI

**C**ould a patchwork government made up of ministers drawn from diverse political parties as the Congress(I), the Janata Dal, the BJP and the left ever work effectively?

Beneath V.P. Singh's outward insouciance at the press conference aboard flight AI 001, there was, however, a certain tension. The facts suggested that the pressures building up against his prime ministership had reached a critical point, no matter how vociferous his denials on this score might be. His main problems emanated from within the Janata Dal itself. Chandra Shekhar, the Thakur leader from Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district, still nursed ambitions for the country's top post and had managed to exploit deputy prime minister Devi Lal's discontentment against V.P. Singh.

The deputy prime minister, on his own part, seemed determined to



It started in earnest from April this year. The Janata Dal's Parliamentary Party meetings began getting rowdier by the day. A few Janata Dal MPs, such as Hari Mohan Dhawan and Harsh Vardhan, turned openly vocal against the government for its failures on the price and law and order fronts. At one such parliamentary party meeting, Ramesh Chandra Gandhi voiced concern at the fact that traders and hoarders seemed unfazed by governmental threats and Ram Dhan

talked about increasing corruption in the administrative apparatus. A number of senior Janata Dal leaders, including Ashoke Sen and V C Shukla, were furious about not being included in the Cabinet. Then, there was that

Some Janata Dal MPs even attacked members of V P Singh's coterie.

## REACTIONS



Congress (in person)

**It (a national government) is needed only in time of a national emergency. And we do not see such an emergency, but only a total failure of the central government on every major issue**



Congress (I) spokesman

**We do not see any reason for a national government and, therefore, the question of the Congress(1) joining the national government simply does not arise**



*Prime Minister*

**I am all in favour of a national government**



*CPI(M) politburo member*

**The CPI(M) had never mooted the idea of a nationalist government. Even V. P. Singh talked about a nationalist government. We are amazed... He is perhaps confused**





**un Shourie suggested that S. Surjeet, Madhu Limaye and Chandra Shekhar had increased the possibility of saving V.P. Singh**

For instance, the government was castigated for allotting bungalows to two of the Prime Minister's close aides, Som Pal and parliamentary affairs minister Satya Pal Malik. The charge was that these two men were

first-term MPs and were not entitled to bungalows. A number of Dal MPs also protested about the postponement of parliamentary party meetings and charged the Dal leadership of trying to stifle dissenting opinion. One angry memorandum signed by 15 Dal MPs was sent to finance minister Madhu Dandavate, complaining about his inaction on the price front.

One of the most disconcerting developments for V.P. Singh was the inexorable rise of Devi Lal and his increasing criticisms of the government. The deputy prime minister's first major victory had been the election of S.R. Bommai to the presidency of the Janata Dal. V.P. Singh's nominee, Jaipal Reddy, had been forced to step aside. After Chautala's ouster, Devi Lal's attacks increased in ferocity and at one point, he even went on record to say that V.P. Singh was capable of stabbing anyone in the back to save his own image. More ominous was his statement that while the National Front government would remain in power for the full five-year term, he could

not say whether Singh would continue as Prime Minister. In a fit of pique, Devi Lal also launched broadsides against R.K. Hegde and Planning Commission member L.C. Jain, both of whom are known V.P. Singh groupies. A few days later, supporters of the Green Brigade, an outfit propounded by Devi Lal, ransacked the Planning Commission office in New Delhi.

Thereafter, Devi Lal deliberately began projecting himself as an alternative Prime Minister, by playing up his peasant identity. At a function in Sisauli (Uttar Pradesh) on the death anniversary of Chaudhary Charan Singh, the *kisan* leader Mahendra Singh Tikait invited Devi Lal to unveil a statue of the late Lok Dal leader. The foundation stone read that the statue would be unveiled by the country's Prime Minister Chaudhary Devi Lal. To drive home his message, Tikait declared that Devi Lal was the Prime Minister of the *kisans* and said he did not care whose Prime Minister V.P. Singh was. Significantly, this function was attended by Devi Lal,

Ajit Singh and Chandra Shekhar. The stage, it seemed, was being prepared for V.P. Singh's final defeat.

A number of related developments confirmed suspicions that a major plot against the Prime Minister was afoot. Chandra Shekhar too had rallied his lieutenants and, from all reports, was prepared for the final assault on the Prime Minister's Office. In the meantime, civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan further complicated matters by meeting Rajiv Gandhi and not disclosing what was discussed. Intelligence sources claimed that commerce minister Arun Nehru too had kept his channels with the Congress(I)'s M.L. Fotedar open and could stage his own little drama at the appropriate moment. Railways minister George Fernandes was also on the



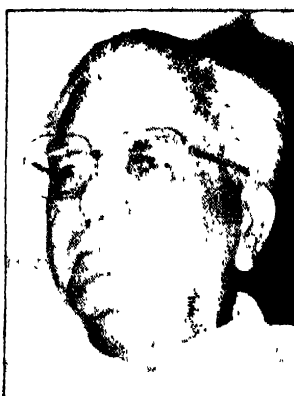
**MADHU LIMAYE**  
Veteran socialist

**The proposition is absurd....I have never used the term national government. I have always said the mandate is against the Congress and what we want is an anti-Congress coalition**



**L.K. ADVANI**  
BJP president

**Mr Singh had not floated the idea and only made an appropriate response to the section which made the proposal to destabilise his leadership and the present equation**



**DEVI LAL**  
Deputy prime minister

**It will be V.P. Singh who will unfurl the national flag from the Lal Qila on 15 August, not I**





RAJESH KUMAR



**A faction of the Janata Dal, the left parties and the Congress(I) are supposed to have hatched a plot to topple the PM. But nobody is sure whether Devi Lal or Rajiv Gandhi was involved**

warpath after being divested of the charge of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) affairs and had held several meetings with Chandra Shekhar.

Equally worrisome for V.P. Singh was the growing disaffection of the BJP with the National Front government. The sacking of Jagmohan from the governorship of Kashmir had greatly angered the BJP, which withdrew its representative, Kedarnath Sahni, from the J&K Affairs Committee. BJP president L.K. Advani, at a press conference, admonished the government for recalling Jagmohan

and dubbed the move as a "Himalayan blunder". The BJP's criticism of the government had reached a peak.

In Madhya Pradesh, BJP chief minister Sunder Lal Patwa accused the Centre of not being serious about writing off farm dues. Gujarat BJP chief Shantersingh Vaghela shot off a letter to the Prime Minister, saying, "The government seems to be over busy in its attempts to survive." In a more personal vein, Vaghela wrote, "As a finance minister of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, you had earned a super-clean reputation. But today people have started

asking as to why you tolerate corrupt people around you? Economic offenders of the country were afraid of finance minister V.P. Singh, but are no longer afraid of Prime Minister V.P. Singh. Why is it so?" Many other politicians were asking similar questions and the situation was ripe for toppling the Prime Minister.

**T**he only question was how precisely it would be done. It seemed obvious that without the Congress(I), which together with its allies controls 216 seats in the Lok Sabha, V.P. Singh could not be toppled. For, V.P. Singh controls at least about 50 MPs and if he was to be challenged within the National Front, the chances were that the Front would merely split and the government collapse. Moreover, it was not certain whether the BJP or the left parties would support either Devi Lal or Chandra Shekhar if it came to the crunch. To form an alternative government, the Congress(I) would have to be roped in. But the necessary conditions had to be created before such a brazen union of convenience could be justified.

The only common platform on which the Congress(I), the Janata Dal and the left could unite was the anti-communal one. Accordingly, on 23 May, representatives of the Congress(I), the Janata Dal and the left parties held a convention against communalism in New Delhi's Vittal Bhai Patel House. The Congress(I)'s representatives included Mohsina Kidwai and V.N. Gadgil, the Janata Dal was represented by UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ram Dhan, and the left parties by Saifuddin Chowdhury, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Indrajit Gupta and Gita Mukherjee. The convention seemed to suggest that an alliance without the BJP was possible. Only, it seemed a little far-fetched to assume that both V.P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi would go along with the idea of being in one government.

But a group of like-minded legislators in the three political groupings were nevertheless determined to go ahead. They shared two common sentiments: firstly, they all felt that V.P. Singh should go and secondly, they were all unnerved by the BJP's spectacular success in consolidating and expanding its political base. In order to cut out both V.P. Singh and the BJP, a small group of key conspirators appears to have hit upon the idea of a non-controversial 'consensus'



candidate for the prime ministership. In this context, three names were bandied about. They were West Bengal's Marxist chief minister Jyoti Basu, Orissa's Dal chief minister Biju Patnaik and the Congress(I) veteran parliamentarian Shankar Dayal Sharma.

The bare outline of the scheme was an alliance of a Janata Dal faction, the left parties and the Congress(I). These three groupings would together form the new government and the new Prime Minister would be chosen from amongst the list of three names. Both V.P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi would be excluded. What is not certain is at what level this plan was discussed. Some reports have suggested that Rajiv Gandhi himself hatched this conspiracy in conjunction with Opposition leaders like Chandra Shekhar and Jyoti Basu. But Rajiv Gandhi and his party spokesmen have strenuously denied any involvement in the plot. Circumstantial evidence too suggests that Rajiv Gandhi was not party to the conspiracy.

For one, people close to Rajiv Gandhi point out that he is determined not to do anything to topple the National Front government at this juncture. The Congress(I) leadership knows that it can form the government the moment 44 MPs cross over to it. "But we should not appear to be hijacking the government," points out Congress(I) MP Kamal Nath. "We have been mandated to sit in the Opposition and that is what we should do." Rajiv Gandhi seems to have understood this and the kind of opprobrium his party would earn if it resorted to underhand politicking to oust V.P. Singh. This is not to suggest that the Congress(I) will not use its considerable clout in Parliament to humble V.P. Singh at some later stage. "Only, the Congress(I) will give its critical support at a moment of its own choosing, not when the opposition wants it," says Kamal Nath, adding that his party leadership knows only too well that "today the Janata Dal will sleep with anybody to survive."

While all this may be true, it is certain that at least one faction of the Congress(I) had definitely toyed with the idea of a coalition government. Janata Dal insiders say that Shankar Dayal Sharma and the Fotedar faction in the party discussed the plan with a few Janata Dal and left MPs. A veteran Congress(I) leader admitted that a small group of senior party leaders still favoured the idea of returning to government through a re-alignment of

## STEPS TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT

### APRIL

Janata Dal MPs start voicing dissension against their party leadership and V.P. Singh in particular

### MID-MAY

A few Dal MPs approach their counterparts in the Congress(I) and the left parties about working out a formula to oust V.P. Singh

### LATE-MAY

The Janata Dal, the Congress(I) and the left parties hold a convention against communalism. The BJP is excluded.



Devi Lal (left) and Chandra Shekhar



The convention against communalism

### LATE-MAY

Devi Lal openly challenges V.P. Singh's prime ministership and joins hands with Chandra Shekhar.

### 31 MAY

Article appears in the Bengali daily, *Anandabazar Patrika*, alleging that Rajiv Gandhi has hatched a plan to instal Jyoti Basu as the Prime Minister.

### 1 JUNE

Arun Shourie writes in the *Indian Express* that Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Madhu Limaye and Chandra Shekhar had met and chalked out a plan to get rid of V.P. Singh.



V.P. Singh

### 5 JUNE

V.P. Singh announces that he favours the idea of a national government and is prepared to step down.

### 6 JUNE

V.P. Singh's statement is greeted with howls of protest. Every political party dissociates itself from the move. The Prime Minister gets a reprieve.

forces. When the Congress(I) leadership learnt of the plan, it momentarily panicked. It feared that the much talked about split in the party was about to take place, perhaps at the initiative of those Congressmen opposed to R.K. Dhawan. As it turned out, nothing like that happened.

Equally unsubstantiated is the allegation that the left, the CPI(M) in particular, had seriously considered the coalition alternative. *Indian Express* editor Arun Shourie, on a front-page article on 1 June, suggested that

the CPI(M) had held a politburo meeting two days earlier to discuss the possibility of Jyoti Basu heading the new government. Shourie claimed that the key persons in the negotiations were politburo member Harkishen Singh Surjeet and the Janata Dal's Madhu Limaye—and that they had both talked to Chandra Shekhar about the possibility of ousting V.P. Singh. But both Limaye and Surjeet have denounced Shourie and taken the matter to the Press Council. Basu too has issued a strong denial.

"The whole thing is a bunch of lies,"



# What is a national government?

*The Indian Constitution says nothing about it*

**T**he idea of a 'national government' is unfamiliar to India. In a Westminster system of democracy like ours, which is based on a multi-party system, it is difficult to imagine how a national government would work. In India, decisions on important issues have always depended on majority opinion and not consensus. Therefore,

Prime Minister would be the leader of the single largest party in the Lower House. In today's context, this would mean that if a national government were to be formed now, the Congress would be given maximum representation in the council of ministers and the head of the government would be the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. Of course, if the party with the highest number of MPs refused to head the government for some reason, the option would then pass to the second single largest party.

But what was surprising about V.P. Singh's announcement was that there is no precedent for a national government in India. Even in case of war, rather than forming a national government, all political parties extend their support to the ruling party. During the

1971 war with Pakistan, Atal Behari Vajpayee had said, "Today, there is one party which is India and its leader is Mrs. Indira Gandhi."

Then, in 1979, President Sanjeeva Reddy had apparently suggested that Morarji Desai think along the lines of a national government to overcome the crisis in the Janata Party. But Desai politely turned down his idea, saying that if he could not manage the different factions within his party, how could he manage an all-party government?

But V.P. Singh does not seem to suffer from any such misgivings. Despite his protestations that he puts the nation above self, political observers agree that his latest announcement is nothing but a ploy to continue in power.

**Rajiv Shukla**



**A.B. Vajpayee and Morarji Desai: neither mooted the idea of a national government**

we have no role model for a national government. Even the Constitution of India does not mention anything about this concept.

However, political pundits agree that a national government could be formed in times of war or if there is a major crisis confronting the country. This would mean that all recognised parties with representation in Parliament would join the government. The ruling party, which proposes the idea, would have to seek a consensus on all major issues facing the country and the government would have to decide on a 'minimum common programme'.

The representation given to various parties in the council of ministers would be directly proportional to the number of MPs they had in the Lok Sabha. And the

says Surjeet, "I have not come across anything of this kind in my 60 years of political life." He claims that the CPI(M) had never mooted the idea of a national government and was amazed that V.P. Singh could suggest it. "We don't conspire. We take open political positions. We have nothing to hide," Surjeet asserts, adding that Shourie's article was aimed at maligning his party at the behest of the BJP which had panicked on account of the success of the 23 May convention against communalism. The BJP's game plan, according to the Marxists, is aimed at capturing power at the Centre on its own in the next general elections. "For them, it (the National Front government) is a stop-gap arrangement. For us, it is not. We are not aiming at coming to power in the

**T**he facts suggest that the pressures building up against V.P. Singh's prime ministership have reached a critical point, no matter how vociferous his denials on this score might be

next five years," he says.

Madhu Limaye, the other leader accused of being involved in the conspiracy, is equally vehement in asserting that he had nothing to do with it. "I have always said the mandate is against the Congress and what we want is an anti-Congress coalition," he explains. "In fact, how many times people like M.J. Akbar have denounced us for negative, blind anti-Congressism right from (Ram Manohar) Lohia's days. It is inconceivable that we would suddenly turn around." Limaye says that he has not met Surjeet for two or three years and has stopped discussing politics with Chandra Shekhar. "When he came to wish me on 1 May, 1990, my birthday, I didn't discuss politics because he has one view of things and I have another."

**I**f these leaders are to be believed, then the plot against V.P. Singh was a complete fiction. In fact, many political observers in the capital



believe that the conspiracy theory was an invention of V P Singh and his cronies, and that Shourie wrote his article on the 'Open War' against the Prime Minister to pre-empt a coup V P Singh, by favouring the idea of a national government, according to this school of thought, succeeded in shaking up his enemies within the party, creating consternation in the Congress(I), and telling the BJP and the left parties that they should behave or else he himself would sink the National Front boat. In all these, he was spectacularly successful.

Virtually the entire political community shrieked in protest at the idea of a national government and held that it was just not feasible. In other words, the Prime Minister had managed to prove to his detractors that a coup with the help of the Congress(I) would not work. If anything, the entire 'Opposition' coalition would sink, be discredited and face the prospect of going to the electorate once again—this time without the slightest credibility. Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal could forget about being Prime Minister for the next decade or so. V P Singh himself could go to the electorate as a Prime Minister wronged and frustrated by conniving leaders.

At the now famous press conference aboard AI 001, the Prime Minister was also addressing the common voters, especially the Hindi belt electorate, when he deliberately switched to Bhojpuri. The TV cameras picked up a Prime Minister speaking in the language which Devi Lal's and Chandra Shekhar's supporters best understand. And he was saying that



In order to cut out both V P Singh and the BJP, a small group of key conspirators appears to have hit upon the idea of a non-controversial 'consensus' candidate for the prime ministership: Bengal's chief minister **Jyoti Basu**, Orissa's chief minister **Biju Patnaik** or the Congress(I) veteran parliamentarian **Shankar Dayal Sharma**.

he was not interested in preserving his own chair, that national problems were what mattered. He was hinting that he was not able to function and if the people were dissatisfied with his performance, they could choose a new leader or elect a new government.

**Chandra Shekhar: will he have his revenge on V.P. Singh?**



Vishwanath Pratap Singh, reverting to old form, was once again trying to tower over his ambitious, politicking colleagues and preach the gospel of value-based politics.

But it was a qualified success. The Prime Minister had also sent out unmistakable signals of instability. As Rajiv Gandhi pointed out, "Although I don't think there is any need for a national government, it is clear that the National Front government has failed on all the fronts and that is why they want change." If the Prime Minister was talking of quitting, he could not at the same time inspire confidence in his own government. V P Singh had clearly lost one major battle in the credibility war. But he was still holding on. Political pundits in the capital predicted that there would be a lull in the attacks on the Prime Minister for the next few months. But V P Singh has clearly bought himself a temporary reprieve. He is fast running out of time—and outlandish ideas.

• **Indranil Banerjee with Nirmal Mitra and Rajiv Shukla**



# The great cover-up



The Kasargod coast: smugglers' paradise

*Are Kerala politicians and a senior police official trying to shield notorious smuggler Abdul Rehman in the Hamsa murder case?*

**K**asargod—on the northern-most tip of Kerala, about 50 kilometres south of Mangalore—has always been a smugglers' paradise. Being part of the Malabar coast, Kasargod also has trade links with the Gulf countries. Earlier, the Arab *dhow*s used to come to India for spices, but today, they mostly carry gold from Dubai. And gold-running is big business in Kasargod. No wonder, the sleepy town is the home of Kerala's best-known smugglers: K. S. Abdullah, Kallatra Abdul Haji, Soopy and many others. The calm sea which flows parallel to the national highway in most places makes Kasargod coast ideal for smuggling. Besides, the area is sparsely inhabited, which also helps the smugglers a great deal to carry on their illegal activities.

Since there is a lot of easy money floating around, Kasargod is full of rags-to-riches stories. One such person is K. M. Hamsa, a bus driver, who

switched to smuggling. But in April last year, he was found killed inside his white Maruti on the national highway at Poinachi on the Kerala border. Hamsa's body was riddled with bullets and investigations revealed that he was shot dead by his employer's—the Dubai-based Abdul Rehman—men. Reason: Hamsa and his friend Kallungal Abubacker had tipped off the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials, leading to the seizure of large quantity of gold. Earlier too, in February 1989, DRI sleuths had intercepted two cars—a Maruti and an Ambassador—on the national highway near Kasargod and recovered gold worth Rs 6.8 crores. The haul consisted of 1,600 gold biscuits weighing 370 kilograms. It was common knowledge in Kasargod that Hamsa and Abubacker had fallen out with Abdul Rehman and they had even turned informers.

This was confirmed a month later when the DRI decided to pay them Rs

96 lakhs, (Rs 50 per gram of gold seized) tax free, for their "help". In the first instalment, the DRI paid Hamsa and Abubacker Rs 45 lakhs in Bangalore, which they deposited with the State Bank of India. The balance was to be paid to them at a later date. However, Hamsa was killed on his way back from Mangalore. His death created a furore in Kasargod and the local police took up the case. But when the ramifications of the crime became evident and it was obvious that the net would have to be cast much wider, the investigation was taken over by the crime branch, special cell, of the Kerala police.

After a detailed probe, the special branch prepared a comprehensive report (156/CR/89) which named 'Pakistan' Abdul Rehman as the brain behind Hamsa's murder. According to the report, the 16 jackets, containing 1,600 gold biscuits, seized by the DRI near Kasargod belonged to Rehman. Rehman's close associates, K. M.



Abdullah and 'Sahina Sari' Mohammed Kunhi, had given the gold biscuits to Hamsa and Abubacker, who were supposed to carry the consignment to Bombay. But, they turned informers and tipped off the cops. Enraged, Rehman himself flew down to India from Dubai and conspired with his close relative, S H. Hyder, and Mohammed Najeer to kill the "betrayers". The report also revealed that Rehman stayed at Summer Sands, a beach resort at Ullal near Kasargod, a few days before the murder. Nine



(From left) The Maruti car from which gold was recovered; and, 'Pakistan' Abdul Rehman (third from left): friends in high places

others, mainly relatives of Abdul Rehman, were also named in the police report as the likely killers of Hamsa.

The investigation took a curious turn at this stage. When inspector general (crime) P J. Alexander saw the report, he was furious. He promptly took the case away from the special cell of the crime branch and asked the Trivandrum-based Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the matter. Said a senior inspector general (IG) of the Kerala police: "Such a thing has never happened before. It was, in fact, the beginning of the greatest cover-up operations in Kerala."

Subsequent events only confirmed the IG's fears. Alexander was determined to frame Abubacker in the murder of Hamsa. He asked a senior police officer in Cannanore to get hold of a picture of Abubacker. Later, Abubacker was picked up for interrogation and was kept under illegal detention for over a month. Meanwhile, SIT officials arrested one person from Bombay and two others from Goa. And they reportedly confessed that they were hired to kill Hamsa. A picture of Abubacker was allegedly recovered from the "killers" of Hamsa. SIT officials also tried to implicate Abubacker by sending a fake telegram addressed to him from Bombay thanking him for giving Rs 15 lakhs to the murderers of Hamsa. But several senior policemen and the media made noises about the way the investigations were being carried out.

Later, when an IPS officer questioned the persons arrested by the

SIT, they broke down and admitted that they did not murder Hamsa. Sensing foul play by Alexander, there was a general outcry in Kasargod district for a CBI inquiry into the sordid

**P. J. Alexander: shielding the guilty?**



events. In October 1989, chief minister E.K. Nayanar, in reply to a petition from Hamsa's daughter, said that the matter has been referred to the CBI for investigation. The CBI also showed interest in the case but due to tremendous work pressure, the bureau could hardly make much progress.

In fact, Alexander's efforts to shield the guilty have baffled many senior police officers of the state, including the director general of police, Rajgopal Narayan. In private conversation, senior police officers alleged that even top Marxist leaders of Kerala are involved in this sordid drama. A.P. Kurian, the former Speaker and presently the political secretary to the chief minister, is said to be backing Alexander. It is, however, common knowledge in Kasargod that Rehman not only masterminded Hamsa's murder but he also tried to save his relatives who have been named in the report filed by crime branch, special cell, Cannanore. However, no CPI(M), Congress(I) or Muslim League MLA said anything against Abdul Rehman because he has political clout. Recently, a top Marxist leader who was critical of Rehman's growing influence in Kerala politics was thrown out of the Cannanore party district committee.

The boyish-looking 'Pakistan' Abdul Rehman (45) is known as "computer" in Kasargod area and all smuggling activities along the Malabar coast are controlled by him. His father had migrated from Sind in Pakistan to Kasargod during Partition. In the late Sixties, Rehman was working as a



clerk for a Dubai-based Pakistani smuggler. Haji Ashraf. That's how the prefix 'Pakistan' got linked to his name. And it was under Ashraf that Rehman learned all the tricks of the trade. But they fell out sometime in the early Eighties after, Ashraf suspected that Rehman had swindled a few million dollars. Rehman was called to London to settle the accounts and when he did not obey, was brutally tortured by Ashraf's men. Later, the London police recovered him from a dustbin and he had to be hospitalised. It was in hospital that he met a Muslim League minister from Kerala, who had come to London for treatment. The minister helped Rehman to

start his smuggling operations all over again in Dubai. But the brutal torture in England had crippled him for life—his right side is partially paralysed even today. He does everything with his left hand and maintains his accounts with the help of a computer.

In the last eight years Rehman's men have successfully smuggled gold from Dubai to India, but they have failed on couple of occasions as well. In 1987, his gang members were caught with gold worth Rs 2 crores in Delhi and in 1988, at Cangolli, near Mangalore in Karnataka, the cops seized yellow metal worth Rs 10.5 crores—the biggest ever haul in the country. Yet again in December 1988,

Rs six crore worth of silver was recovered from his men at Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu. Said K.S. Bhatt, assistant director, DRI (Mangalore), to whom Hamsa and Abubacker had leaked information regarding the Thalapady seizure. "Today, Abdul Rehman is said to be the kingpin of the gold-running business in the country. The customs and the DRI men would love to interrogate him but surprisingly enough, the man's name does not feature in police record." Besides, Abdul Rehman does not stay in any place in India for more than 24

## "The government is trying to shield Abdul Rehman"

*Abubacker on the murder of his partner, Hamsa*

Kallingal Abubacker (42) was among the many people in Kasargod who took to smuggling at a tender age. By the time he was 16, Abubacker was already into the illegal business, trading in watches and textiles for a Bombay-based smuggler. Later, he went over to Dubai and started working for the notorious smuggler, 'Pakistan' Abdul Rehman. In 1987, he and his friend Hamsa became transporting agents, smuggling gold biscuits from Kasargod coast to Bombay. In March 1988 they carried out an operation on their own. This, greatly impressed Rehman. He promised to pay them Rs 25,000 per jacket—one jacket usually contains 100 gold biscuits—but later paid them only Rs 12,000. Abubacker decided to teach Rehman a lesson. In February 1989, he tipped off the DRI, leading to the seizure of a large quantity of gold. This infuriated Rehman and he swore to kill Abubacker. But the one-time accomplice of Abdul Rehman is unperturbed and lives a normal life, in fact, he is all set to marry for the third time. Abubacker also contested the last Lok Sabha elections from Kasargod as an independent candidate. Sitting in his house at Pallikkara, he spoke to SUNDAY. Excerpts from the interview:

**SUNDAY: How did you get into smuggling?**

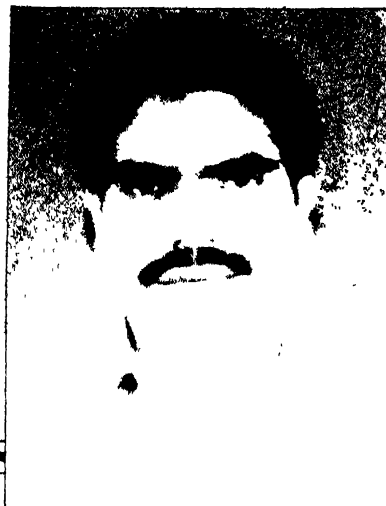
**Abubacker:** I started smuggling goods at a very young age. From watches and textiles to gold. I used to drive Maruti cars from Kasargod to Bombay with gold concealed under the seat and driving board.

**Q: Whom did you work for?**

**A:** I was working for the big-time smuggler, Abdul Rehman, along with my partner Hamsa, who incidentally is related to Rehman. Abdul Rehman belongs to Dawood Ibrahim's gang in Dubai.

**Q: Why did you turn into an informer?**

**Hamsa, who was killed by Rehman's men**



**Abubacker: 'the cops are involved'**

**A:** Abdul Rehman and his accountant, K.M. Abdullah, were not straight in their dealings. They had promised us Rs 25,000 for a jacket of gold to be delivered in Bombay but ended up paying much less. Moreover, a career as a transporting agent hardly fetches money and that cannot be accounted for because they are black, anyway. It was then that we realised that there was no point working for Rehman and decided to turn informers.

**Q: Would you say that Hamsa was killed by Abdul Rehman's men?**

**A:** There is no doubt about it. Rehman himself used to ring up and threaten me, especially after the seizure of his gold. He wanted us to come to Dubai and settle our accounts. I'm sure that Rehman and his relatives have killed Hamsa.

**Q: Who asked you to come to an understanding with Rehman?**

**A:** After Hamsa's death I was interrogated by the customs men in



hours and is said to possess a dozen passports. His operations in India is managed by his relative, K M Abdullah, who is based in Bombay, Abdullah, considered to be the prime suspect in the Hamsa murder case, was recently arrested in connection with the seizure of Rs six crore worth of silver. But Abdullah managed to escape from the heavily-guarded Madras Central Jail and fled to Dubai. Two of the other accused in the Hamsa case have also escaped to Dubai.

**D**espite being a wanted man, Abdul Rehman comes to India quite often. Last year, crime branch officials investigating Hamsa's murder

informed Alexander about Rehman's arrival in Trivandrum. But nobody was prepared to arrest him because of his proximity to the IG (crime) and the Marxist leaders in the Malabar coast. Said K A Zaibunisa, wife of Hamsa, "It is more than a year since my husband was brutally killed. But the Kerala police and the state government has not been able to track down his killers." Zaibunisa also said that Hamsa's diary has references to the death threat issued by Rehman and Abdullah. The diary, which is now in Alexander's possession, also gives detailed information about the activities

and operations of Abdul Rehman. Added Zaibunisa, "It is true that my husband turned informer. But if the government can't protect the life of an informer, then how can it wish to prevent smuggling? The Kerala police is only interested in protecting Rehman. The killers will only be traced if the CBI actively takes up the case." (Incidentally, she and her seven children are only getting the interest from the reward money deposited in the bank since Hamsa has not mentioned a nominee in the bank certificate.)

These embarrassing disclosures have only smeared the image of the

Calicut. Later, assistant collector (customs) informed me that the inspector general (crime) Alexander, wants me to strike a compromise with Rehman. But I refused.

**Q: When did you realise that Alexander had a role in the cover-up operation?**

**A:** Alexander interrogated me in Kasargod where I confessed everything. I even told him why I turned an informer. Later, he called me to Cannanore and questioned me further. And when I wanted police protection, he refused it, adding that he would kill me and give me a decent burial.

**Q: Why did the SIT under Alexander pick you up and question you for a month in Trivandrum?**

**A:** They wanted to frame me in the Hamsa murder case. I was kept under illegal detention for a month.

**Q: Your brother could have filed a habeas corpus...**

**A:** My family was scared that the police may kill me and put the blame on Abdul Rehman's gang.

**Q: What did Alexander ask you during the interrogation?**

**A:** He did not ask me anything about Hamsa's murder. Instead, he kept asking me why I hated Rehman so much and what did he do to me.

**Q: Do you feel Alexander had links with Rehman?**

**A:** I will tell you a small incident. During the interrogation there was a phone call, but Alexander kept the receiver down. It rang again after two minutes and Alexander

The gold biscuits seized by the police after a tip-off by Abubacker

took the receiver and kept it off the hook and then started questioning me. I'm sure Rehman was at the other end, listening to our conversation.

**Q: Are you convinced that as long as Alexander is in charge, the Hamsa murder case is not going to be solved?**

**A:** I'm sure that Alexander and the Kerala government is trying to protect the real killers of Hamsa and the man who had masterminded it—Abdul Rehman. Unless the case is taken up by the CBI, nothing is going to happen.

**Q: What about your future? Are you still being harassed by the police?**

**A:** A pistol licence granted to me after Hamsa's murder has been cancelled by the district collector because the police report states that I'm short-tempered. I have given up smuggling and I intend to lead a retired life.

Kerala police. Said a senior police officer, "None of us have the guts to bell the cat out. In fact, some of the police officers who have made the preliminary investigations were hopping mad and were either transferred or silenced which has affected the morale of our force. I am convinced that a huge sum of money was paid to shield the real culprits. Another secretary has written a confidential letter to the chief secretary of state asking why proper action was not being taken against P J Alexander."

What is more, no MLA in the state is willing to take up the issue in the state Assembly, fearing persecution by the powerful smuggler lobby. Abdul Rehman, on his part, is willing to spend any amount of money to ensure that he continues to maintain a clean record in India. He has an excellent network of informers in the customs and also in the Kerala administration who keep him posted with the latest developments. With all the powerful parties on Abdul Rehman's side, it is doubtful whether Hamsa's real killers will ever be booked. ●

**Sreedhar Pillay/ Kasargod and Mangalore**



# No end in sight

*Punjab has a new Governor, but are such cosmetic changes enough?*

**F**inally, it seems that the government has decided to discard its policy of drift on Punjab. The Governor has been changed and the exit of the state's police chief, K.P.S. Gill is on the cards. Both decisions were, apparently, taken because of mounting pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a section of the Janata Dal's own leadership, exposing yet again the difficulties V.P. Singh is having in running a minority government. Nonetheless, the developments were welcome, signalling as they did that the Raja's regime had finally been shaken out of its stupor.

The man selected to replace Nimal Mukarji was Virendra Verma, a Rajya Sabha member of the Janata Dal, who had been close to former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh. Verma's name was cleared by the Cabinet on 7 June, after a long week of intense politicking and vacillation.

The events which preceded the appointment, exposed the deep fighting in the government on the Punjab issue. Even before Mukarji resigned on 1 June, the former Cabinet secretary, P.K. Kaul was declared a likely successor. Home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and commerce minister Arun Nehru were apparently plugging for Kaul, but his appointment was strongly opposed by deputy prime minister Devi Lal, and later, industry minister Ajit Singh. The Tau and Singh argued that a "seasoned politician" should be put in charge of the troubled state—a retired bureaucrat would be completely ineffective. Surprisingly enough, the example offered by the ministers was that of Arjun Singh, who as Governor had helped clinch the Rajiv-Longowal peace accord in 1985.

The Congress(I) didn't seem to view Verma's appointment too positively. Said party member S.S. Ahluwalia: "By this time word has gone around that this government does not give its Governors freedom to operate. Therefore, P.K. Kaul and some others turned down the offer. I also think

Virendra Verma is too meek a man to control the situation in Punjab."

But the Dal government has evidently decided that Verma is its best bet. After Kaul spurned the Raja's offer, some other names were thrown about, prominent among them former Border Security Force (BSF) chief K.F. Rustomji, former Orissa chief minister Shyam Sunder Mahapatra and even former I&B secretary S.S. Gill. But apparently none of them passed muster and as Gill said: "I did not even receive feelers from the government." So Virendra Verma it was, his appointment regarded as a victory for the Devi Lal camp (Verma owes allegiance to the erstwhile Lok Dal-B group).

But would Verma succeed where Mukarji had failed? The BJP doesn't seem to think so. According to Kedarnath Sahni, party general secretary, the BJP had nothing personal against Mukarji, but merely wanted him to act decisively. "We feel the government has no policy on Punjab. It only seems to blow hot and cold," he says. "There is no clear

**Virendra Verma: will he be successful?**



ASHOK VAHIA



direction from the Centre and a mere change of Governor will not help."

Mukarji's experience in the state is the best indicator of what lies in store for Verma. When he took over as the state's 23rd Governor in December last year, Mukarji had said that he wanted to give a "civil face" to the Punjab administration. But even before he could get down to that task in right earnest, he was asked to quit. Mukarji confessed to being bitterly disappointed that his task of building bridges had remained unfinished, and that he could achieve little in the face of central indifference.

**W**ith Verma at the helm, there is every possibility that the government will revert back to the policy it was following soon after the general elections in Punjab—that of projecting former chief minister, Prakash Singh Badal as a moderate leader who could take charge. A powerful section of the Cabinet felt that the United Akali Dal (UAD) leader, Simranjeet Singh





**Simranjeet Singh Mann (third from right) with his followers: is he a burden for the Centre?**

Mann would soon discredit himself as a viable choice for the chief ministership. Then, the time would be propitious to prop up Badal, instead. This plan was fully endorsed by Devi Lal.

But Mann lost the halo he had acquired during the elections sooner than expected. He was dismissed by the people of Punjab and the political leadership as a confused, prevaricating politician who sang to the tune of the militants. The central government also realised there could be no peaceful solution to the Punjab problem with Mann as chief minister. Once this realisation crystallised Mann and his followers were detained on the fifth anniversary of Operation Bluestar.

In a show of strength, the authorities in Amritsar took stern steps to foil the *shaheedi samagam* organised jointly by Mann's group, the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and the Panthic Committee. As a

build up to the protest day, militants had been making pro-Khalistani speeches in various parts of Punjab. A confrontation seemed imminent as from 4 June onwards, the police erected pickets around the Golden Temple and blocked all entrances leading to the Diwan Manji Hall.

Mann was among the 200 activists who were prevented from approaching the shrine to hold the *samagam*. He was detained by the police near Rayva and released three days later. Among the others detained were the AISSF (Manjit Singh faction) president, Bhai Manjit Singh, the Dandami Taksal spokesman, Bhai Mokham Singh, and the UAD leader, Bimal Khalsa. Other social activists such as Justice Ajit Singh Baines and Major Gen. Narinder Singh (retired) were stopped due to the prohibitory orders. And hundreds of ordinary pilgrims who were inside the shrine at that time were prevented

from going outside for long hours.

Though the detention was very brief and meant to demonstrate the muscle power of the security forces, the action showed that the government was willing to antagonise Mann and the other AISSF activists. This despite the fact that though Mann had been released at the behest of the Rajiv Gandhi government, he had gradually been built up by the Janata Dal leadership. His preventive detention seems to have brought the wheel full circle.

**W**ith Mann and the government on a collision course and former chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala, despatched to Tamil Nadu as Governor, Badal becomes the only viable alternative in Punjab. But Badal himself has been expressing his dissatisfaction with the Janata Dal government and will make heavy demands before accepting any responsibility in the state. But Ahluwalia maintains, "This too will not help. The government should not impose any chief minister on Punjab. It will mean that they are only capable of striking deals but not bringing back peace."

Kedarnath Sahni feels that though the Prime Minister did his bit by visiting Punjab, Governor Mukarji, unfortunately, did not take advantage of the changed situation. "What the BJP feels," he says, "is that under no circumstances should the government consider negotiating with the militants. They were thinking about it for some time and should discard that option altogether."

The Bharatiya Janata Party is, undoubtedly, most critical of the Dal's Punjab policy. Five BJP MPs toured the border districts and other sensitive areas of the state and returned with a disturbing assessment of the situation.

Among the observations of this team was that though the Lok Sabha polls had inspired some hope in the people of Punjab, "the confidence received a severe jolt when the central government started giving importance to those Akali leaders who had won the Lok Sabha elections under duress and who considered themselves essentially the spokesmen for the terrorists. This created a general impression as if the central leadership wanted to leave the future of the people of Punjab at the mercy of the terrorists. Consequently the administration became totally inactive and passive and a sense of frustration and panic in the people at large has prevailed."





**B**adal is the only viable alternative in Punjab. But he will make heavy demands before accepting any responsibility in the state

The BJP team also arrived at some alarming conclusions. According to it almost all Hindu families in the border districts of Punjab have migrated to safer places. More than 50 per cent migration has taken place from other villages, and from big towns and cities. Ten to 20 per cent people have either migrated to Haryana or Delhi, or are in the process of doing so. Hindu teachers, doctors and industrialists have become the brunt of terrorist attacks. "So", says Sahni, "simply asking Mukerji to quit means nothing. There have to be clear directions from the government."

The BJP has recommended that the government take the following steps if it wants to alter the situation in Punjab:

- All talk of holding early elections to the Vidhan Sabha should stop till such time when decisive steps have been taken to curb terrorism
- Steps should be taken to seal the Indo-Pak border, create a security belt and destroy the training camps being run in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
- A new joint northern police zone comprising Haryana, Delhi, Chandigarh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir should be formed

garh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir should be formed

- Screening should be done to identify the black sheep in the Punjab police and the intelligence agencies.
- 'Peace first and election afterwards' and 'Punish the guilty and protect the innocent'. These two mottoes should form the permanent basis of the Punjab policy.

But such advice is easier given than implemented. Governor Verma faces an uphill task in the state where, according to some, terrorist violence has reached the level of the pre-Operation Bluestar days. Around ten persons become victims of terrorism every day, and of late Scheduled Castes are special targets.

**P**olitical observers are also distressed by the manner in which terrorists killed in police encounters are being eulogised by the people. During the last session of Parliament, home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed admitted that over 50,000 people attended the *bhog* ceremony of a terrorist known as 'Toofan'. While he

was alive 'Toofan' had acquired a Robin Hood-kind of image and, according to some reports, nearly one lakh mourners had gathered to pay homage to the dead terrorist. This, coupled with the pro-militant propaganda spread by Mann, is slowly making terrorism acceptable to the Sikh masses.

Communist leader Satyapal Dang says "In the early days of the Janata Dal regime, the government virtually gave a free lease to propagate Khalistan." According to him the formation of the Khalsa Panchayat in the rural areas, thanks to a call given by Manjit Singh, and the corruption in the Punjab police had further deteriorated the situation.

Now, though Virendra Verma is nominally in charge, V P Singh will be forced to take certain tough decisions on Punjab. He is committed to holding the Assembly elections within six months from 11 May. The new Governor has promised that the electoral process in Punjab would be completed before the 11 November deadline. On the eve of taking over office Verma declared "I am determined to initiate steps for the early restoration of a popular government which alone can win the confidence of the people of the state."

If the government is keen on holding elections on schedule and making an early settlement with Badal, it will first have to risk a change in the top echelons of the Punjab police. This is no easy task. The removal of K.P.S. Gill will not please the BJP and some other Hindu factions in the state. On the other hand, it might be regarded as a triumph for Mann and the militant factions who have been lobbying to have him sacked for some time now.

Meanwhile, some lower-level changes have already been made in the state's police set-up and a hunt is on for a successor to Gill. Apparently, among the contenders for what is the toughest police post in the country are S.S. Brar, a director general of Haryana and R.S. Mangat, a director general of the Punjab police force, and generally regarded as Gill's understudy. Even B.S. Bedi, a tough police officer currently posted in Uttar Pradesh and I.S. Bhinder are being considered as possible replacements.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the government will content itself with cosmetic changes or go in for major initiatives. For, as far as Punjab is concerned, time is rapidly running out. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



■ Gopal Jagannathan couldn't stand the air in Calcutta. Ever since he moved to the city from the Kurseong hills—where he was brought up—the 31-year-old dealer in earth-moving equipment kept coming down with bad attacks of asthma. The allopathic drugs he took provided immediate relief but the attacks got worse and his business suffered. After living with the disease for about eight years, Jagannathan went to see an ayurvedic physician. He didn't believe anything would come of it, but in a short while was putting on weight and recovering his zest for life. Now—after a year and a half of abstaining from dangerous and habit-forming steroids—he is convinced that he has been completely cured.

■ Sunita Arora (not her real name) became alarmed when she suddenly began losing blood a few years ago. She consulted a number of allopaths—all of whom recommended that she go in for a hysterectomy. Petrified at having to undergo surgery, Arora approached Dr Santosh Jalukar, a Bombay-based ayurvedic practitioner. Jalukar diagnosed her ailment as *adhogga rakta pitta* and asked her to give his medicines a chance. In just ten days, the bleeding stopped.

■ Neelam's problem began when she was 25. Suddenly and inexplicably, she began developing a rash of pimples. The number of pimples kept increasing with every passing month and they left ugly scars on her face. Neelam tried everything that her friends suggested and after having unsuccessfully applied virtually every available cream in the market, was resigned to the way she looked. Then, someone told her of a herbal cure centre in the city. After eight weeks of treatment, the angry red pimples vanished. But as the scars remained, Neelam was advised to use certain herbal creams and lotions. In a year, the scars also disappeared. Although she sports a fine clear skin now, Neelam continues with the treatment. "It is my insurance against a future assault," she says.

# BACK TO NATURE

## India rediscovers ayurveda. But how effective is it?

**T**hese are not isolated instances. Of late, more and more Indians are turning to ayurveda when searching for a cure. No longer is ayurveda treated as an arcane system of medicine practised by obscurantists and cranks and availed of by the naive and the gullible. No longer is allopathy perceived as a panacea for all ills, revered as the last word in health care. When Mahatma Gandhi described modern medicine as "concentrated black magic" decades ago, most people felt he was—to say the least—overstating the point. But now, with the growing awareness of the dangers and limitations

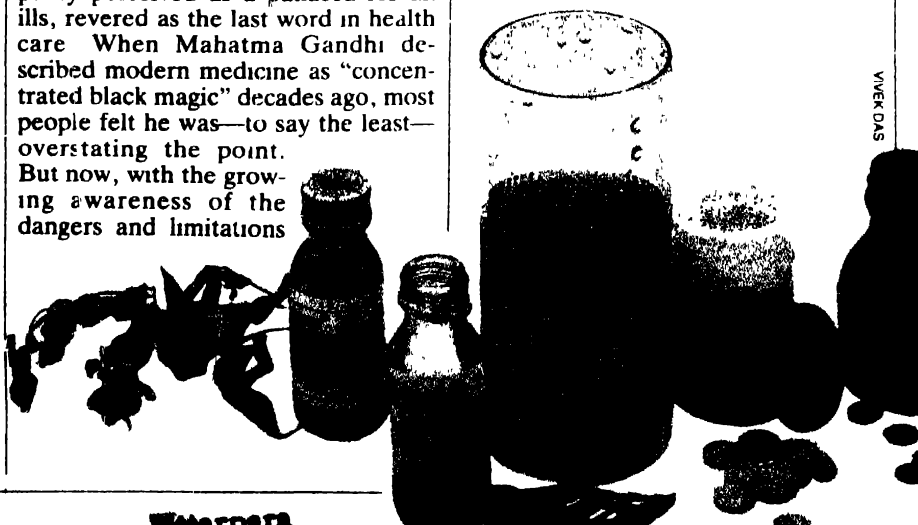
of the allopathic system of treatment, the answer for many Indians is: naturally ayurveda.

*Vaidyas* all over the country testify to the increasing interest that is being shown in ayurveda. Says Ananda Ray, assistant professor at Calcutta's Ashtanga Ayurvedic College: "People have much more faith in ayurveda now than ever before. I would say that the number of patients who come for treatment has increased by as much as 60 per cent over the last two decades." Much of this increase, it appears, has been the result of a change in the attitude of India's educated upper middle class. Says Shib Kali Bhattacharya, one of the leading *kavirajs* in the city: "Although the lower and middle classes still constitute the bulk

of those who seek ayurvedic treatment, the number of patients from the literate elite has grown vastly."

Predictably, there has been a tremendous spurt in the sale of ayurvedic products and entrepreneurs all over the country are cashing in on this boom. Consider some facts:

- Today, the Bombay-based Himalaya Drug Company, a modern pharmaceutical firm which manufactures only ayurvedic formulations, enjoys an annual turnover of a mind-boggling Rs 31 crores. This makes it one of the top 20 drug companies in the country.
- The company's most popular pro-



VIVEK DAS



MUKUND PADMANABHAN

**V.V. VYAS**

Professor at Bombay's Podar  
Ayurvedic College

**I**ncreasingly, it is only those who are blind who continue to have faith in allopathy. Those with their eyes open are looking for safer alternatives

duct, Liv 52—a herbal formulation used in the treatment of liver disorders—accounts for almost Rs 13 crores of its annual sales. In other words, it is one of the ten best selling medicines in India.

• The yearly sales of ayurvedic medicines at Kottakkal's famous Arya Vaidya Sala increases by as much as 20-25 per cent a year. Now, the annual turnover of the institute (which is a non-profit trust) amounts to as much as Rs 20 crores—more than five times

what it was at the turn of the decade. Says the Arya Vaidya Sala's chief physician P.S. Varier: "We just cannot meet the demand for our products."

• Three years ago, the Bombay-based drug company Cipla Ltd began manufacturing Guglip—a product based on the *guggulu* plant that is widely used in ayurveda. Guglip is now prescribed by allopaths for people with high cholesterol levels. Annual sales: Rs 48 lakhs already.

• At the turn of the Seventies, Shahnaz Husain, a student of cosmetics chemistry in Europe and an ayurvedic buff, returned to India to set up shop in a balcony of her New Delhi home. Husain began modestly, but her range of herbal cosmetics (which she claims are ayurvedic products) became a rage only in the Eighties. Today, she is an international celebrity,

## A YURVEDA AND CURE

*How effective are ayurvedic medicines? Do they really work? Ayurveds themselves have no doubts about the efficacy of their formulations. But when questioned about success rates are likely to point out that ayurveda is more than a drug-based system. For example, many of the diseases listed below also require the patient to undergo panchakarma: a system of treatment which includes, among other things, induced vomiting (vaman) and purgation (virechan). Rarely is a disease treated by medicines alone and most ayurveds would prescribe—depending on the ailment—a regimen which includes dietary restrictions, massages and a regulated lifestyle.*

### ● ASTHMA

(Ayurvedic name: *tamak swash*)

**Allopathic treatment:** Broncho-dilators and steroids. Provides

temporary relief but leads to a host of complications such as habituation, puffiness of the face and gain in weight

**Ayurvedic treatment:** A variety of medicines, including extracts from the roots and leaves of *vasha*, *datura* seeds and *arka* leaves. Treatment takes anything between two and four months.

**Success rate:** Not very high in cases of chronic asthma, but some *vaidyas* claim success with 20-25 per cent of the patients. The figure is much higher with respect to asthma of the allergic variety: some put it as high as 80 per cent.

### ● ARTHRITIS

(Ayurvedic name: *amavatha* or *sandhivatha*)

**Allopathic treatment:** Cortisones and NSAIDs (non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs). Relieves discomfort and

pain for a few days but does not check the progression of the disease.

**Ayurvedic treatment:** A number of herbal medicines, including *rasna*, *balathak*, *asvagandha* and the now well-known *guggulu*. (Modern research has established that the *guggulu* plant is effective in lowering cholesterol levels, thus reducing the chances of heart attacks.)

Treatment, which lasts two to three months, includes dry fomentation (usually with wheat or sand) for rheumatoid arthritis and wet fomentation (with *mahanarayan tel*) for non-rheumatoid cases.

**Success rate:** About 70 per cent. Probably ayurveda's biggest success; patients have been known to be

wheeled into hospitals and discharged back on their feet.

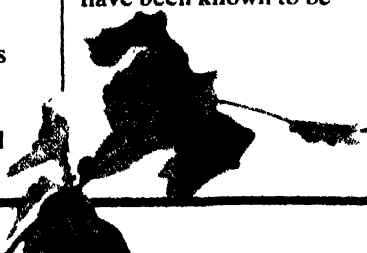
### ● HEPATITIS

(Ayurvedic name: *yakruth vikara*)

**Allopathic treatment:** No cure; only supportive treatment such as rest, glucose and vitamins and a non-fatty diet.

**Ayurvedic treatment:** *Kutki*, *kala megha*, *daru haridra*, *bhoomi amla* and the classical compound made of both herbs and metals—*arogya vardhini*. Nowadays, allopaths routinely prescribe the hugely successful Liv 52 (manufactured by the Himalaya Drug Company) or similar ayurvedic formulations.

**Success rate:** Estimated to be very high, though there is some controversy about this. Many allopaths believe





has franchises in about 45 countries all over the world and runs one hell of a business. Her success has spawned a number of companies eager for a slice of the rapidly growing herbal cosmetics trade.

• When the Pendharkars of Vicco Laboratories, which started operations in a small way back in 1952, began marketing an ayurvedic tooth powder, a toothpaste and a turmeric-based cream, the products bombed. Annual sales amounted to a paltry Rs 1 lakh. Ayurvedic formulations, managing director G K Pendharkar recalls, were simply not 'in'. But with ayurveda turning fashionable and some clever advertising, the range of Vicco products became household names. Today, the company's turnover stands at Rs 10 crores and the success it has had with its toothpaste has encouraged others to enter the market. Now, Balsara Hygiene Products, which manufactures Promise (with clove oil) and Babool (with the "good-

**SHIB KALI BHATTACHARYA**  
A leading kaviraj of Calcutta

**The number of patients from the literate elite has grown vastly, though the lower and middle classes still constitute the bulk**



ness of the babul plant"), claims to enjoy 22 per cent of the market share.

Most traditional *vaidyas*, of course, would be horrified by the suggestion that many of the above products are ayurvedic. "To call Shahnaz Husain an ayurvedic practitioner is an insult

to Charaka (the system's most important exponent)," scoffed one. But, regardless of the debates over what constitutes genuine ayurvedic medicine, the facts above clearly establish a couple of things. That Indians are going back to nature with a vengeance and

that the medicines are only placebos and that ayurveds are deceived by the disease's natural remission.

### ● COLITIS

(Ayurvedic name *pakwashaya gahwala*)

#### Allopathic treatment:

Anti-amoebic drugs and shalizoxyrene (used for irritable bowel syndrome) with limited results.

#### Ayurvedic treatment:

*Parpati kalpa*, a compound of minerals and metals, in gradually increasing and

later gradually decreasing doses. The pulp of the fruit *bel* is also administered.  
**Success rate:** Good. About 60 per cent or so.

### ● CONSTIPATION

(Ayurvedic name *koshta baddhata*)

#### Allopathic treatment:

Strong purgatives which provide relief but are habit-forming. Nowadays, allopaths—as ayurveds have done for long—also stress the importance of a

balanced diet and exercise in dealing with constipation.

#### Ayurvedic treatment:

*Isabgol* (flea seed husk), *senna* leaves, *madhu yashu* (licorice root) and other natural substances.

**Success rate:** Many Indians resort to ayurvedic medicines to deal with constipation and, by all accounts, they are both effective and safe.

### ● OTHER DISEASES

Ayurveda is also regarded



as effective for a number of other diseases such as hyper-acidity, diabetes, filariasis, sciatica, malarial fever, fistula, etc. Dr V.N. Pandey, director of the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha (CCRAS), has, in his book, *Handbook Of Ayurvedic Domestic Medicines*, isolated 74 diseases for which he thinks ayurveda has a cure. However, as he admits, this is a number that few accept. Most allopaths would think it a gross exaggeration and traditional ayurveds a wild—and unpardonable—underestimation.





that there is plenty in it for anyone who wants to cash in on the trend.

**M**ost *vaidyas* believe that the main reason for the ayurvedic boom is the disenchantment with modern medicine. Says Professor V.V. Vyas of Bombay's Podar Ayurvedic College: "Increasingly, it is only people

who are blind who continue to have complete faith in the allopathic system. All those with their eyes open are now looking for safer alternatives." Adds Dr P.P. Sharma, principal of the ayurvedic and unani Tibbia College: "Educated people are now fully aware of the harmful effects that allopathic drugs have in the long run. Today, more people are willing to wait just

that little longer—willing to trade in quick relief for a permanent cure."

According to Dr Kuldeep Raj Kohli, who is attached to the Podar Ayurvedic Hospital in Bombay, the renewed interest in ayurveda owes a lot to its recent commercialisation. In a sense, he says, we should be thankful to companies such as Vicco, Bala and Dabur. "For, if anything,

## FACE IT

*Shahnaz Husain is the begum of the beauty business*

**A**s one might expect from a woman who makes a living selling pure herbal cosmetics, Shahnaz Husain loves plants. Anthuriums, roses, orchids and a host of other flowering plants crowd Flagship Salon—her swank marble-and-glass beauty parlour in New Delhi's Greater Kailash. Only, they're all artificial—pure plastic.

Husain—who has been acclaimed in the West as India's Helena Rubenstein—loves animals too. The mirror-ceilinged waiting-room adjacent to the salon is furnished with a large zebra rug and cushioned stools of stuffed elephant leg. Only, they're all real—pure hide.

When the visitor is whisked upstairs—by a wide spiral marble staircase—to meet the brassy begum of the beauty business, he is likely to realise that Husain is a woman of many contradictions. With her gown of shimmering brocaded blue silk, painstakingly coiffured hair, silver-coloured pumps, chunky jewellery and a ring with a stone the size of a football field, Husain—who would make Madonna appear hopelessly conventional and bland—isn't everybody's idea of a specialist in ayurvedic science.

But beneath all that mascara and rouge (all natural, of course), Hu-

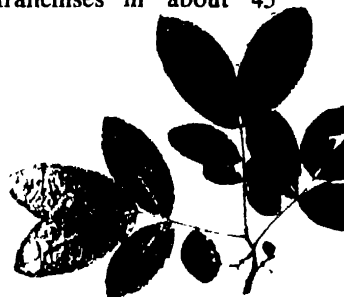
sain is—perhaps contradictorily again—a down-to-earth, plain-speaking and unaffected person, though possessed with a shrewd sense for business. She can be candid about the effectiveness of her formulations ("My help counts for about 30 per cent, the rest depends on diet and exercise"), generous about the large number of imitators that she has spawned ("Oh, I wouldn't say they are bad and then, there is space for everybody in the herbal market") and even modest about her success ("I was

lucky that I was the first to enter the field").

The former student of cosmetics chemistry in Europe—who returned to India in the early Seventies and set up shop in an unused balcony at her New Delhi home—has virtually created a market in herbal beauty care and then wiped it clean. Today, she manufactures over 50 herbal creams and lotions; has a Shahnaz Herbal clinic in virtually every decent-sized Indian town; has lent her name and expertise to franchises in about 45



A facial at a Husain clinic: in search of youth and beauty



countries across the world (Boney M. runs the one in the Canary Islands!); gets Barbara Cartland to promote her goods; finds customers in celebrities such as Monaco's Princess Grace and Sweden's Ingrid Bergmann; and—more importantly—enjoys a turnover which is estimated at about Rs 10 crores.

It is a success she owes only to herself and, in no small measure, to the promotion of her personality. Unlike her competitors in India and abroad, Husain doesn't advertise. "Here I don't need to as



they have contributed towards making more and more people aware of ayurvedic medicines." Kohli also believes that the allopathic community has played its part in popularising ayurveda. "Quite a few of them have developed an interest in exploring the ayurvedic system—perhaps, because it is our own," he says. "This has led some of them to study our herbs, etc.,

and has given ayurveda added respectability."

Perhaps, the most significant piece of research conducted on an ayurvedic herb was done by G V. Satyavati, presently deputy director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Satyavati's work was inspired by a somewhat obscure *shloka* in Sushruta's (600 BC) famous ayurve-

dic treatise. The *shloka* seemed to suggest that *guggulu*—a plant commonly used by ayurveds in the treatment of arthritis—could also help in regulating cholesterol levels. Scientific tests confirmed this and the study was the basis for a doctoral thesis she submitted in 1966.

Subsequently, various clinical studies have reinforced Satyavati's findings. And three years ago, the Bombay-based drug company Cipla Ltd began marketing Guglip tablets—created by extracting the natural steroids from the plant. The drug has proved immensely successful and the *guggulu* story is a fine example of how an ancient insight has led to a modern discovery.

Guglip of course is not the only drug that has been developed in India from a study of plants. Reserpine, one of the first drugs evolved to combat blood pressure, is the result of research conducted by Dr Vakil on the plant *sarpagandha*—for which there are also ayurvedic references. Says Dr Ashok Vaidya, the medical director of Ciba-Geigy who is keenly interested in ayurvedic research: "There are hundreds of plants that can be scientifically examined but without the will, research is going to continue at a lackadaisical pace."

For the most part, drug companies have been content to promote herbal cough drops, garlic pills and the like. And their association with ayurveda is limited to exploiting the tag 'herbal' for whatever it is worth. The logic for this is simple: non-essential medicines is where the real money is. For instance, Richardson Hindusthan's Vicks Vaporub—which is labelled as an ayurvedic product—sold as much as Rs 9 crores last year.

It is ironic that the situation is similar with respect to manufacturers of ayurvedic products—be they commercial firms such as Dabur or traditional establishments such as Kottak-



**Shahnaz Husain: a head for beauty**

everybody knows me and my products and in the West, I simply can't afford to," she says. So Husain, in her own words, has resorted to "selling her personality". "I have created a powerful identity between me and my products," she says.

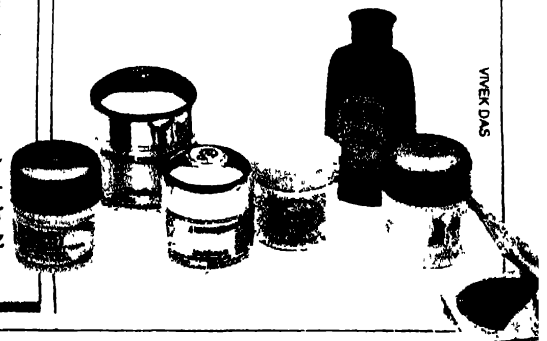
That she has. Husain's lotions and creams are sold in carrier bags that have large colour photographs of her face splashed on them and are all named after her (Shahenna, the shampoo; Shaqueen, the moisturiser; Shabase, the foundation cream; Shalips, the lipstick and so on). Her press hand-out, which is packaged in a large and snazzy folder, contains clippings about her from publications as diverse as *The Washington Post* and the *Saudi Gazette*. It also has a booklet on her life which begins, "This is the story of a Beauty Moghul. Of a woman imbued with a burning desire to recapture India's great Herbal Heritage...a woman obsessed with a passion for beauty and a vision that knows no bounds" and carries on in pretty much the same vein.

At the moment, Husain

is concentrating hard on making a dent in the foreign market. She has left the business in India—which, she suggests, is all sewn up—in her daughter Nelofer's hands. "Every girl in India dreams of starting a Shahnaz parlour and we could easily do 10 to 20 franchises a month. But we're not so interested in expanding here; we want to maintain the quality," she says.

Nowadays, most of her energy is spent in promoting her products abroad. As she can't afford to advertise, Husain fetches publicity through the ingenious method of calling press conferences at which she lectures on the ayurvedic system of treatment and the dangers of using synthetic cosmetics. At the end of her talk, the questions invariably centre around her products and she gets the kind of press she wants. "I am at my best before a foreign audience," she says.

She doesn't do too badly at home either. Every day, hundreds of women flock to her clinics all over the country in search of youth and beauty. Can she make them beautiful? "Well," says Husain, "we can certainly help." Can she make them youthful? "No," she replies honestly, "we can't stop a person from getting wrinkles—we can only slow down the process." Only last month, however, Husain launched a day and night cream package in London called Himalayan Herbs: Age to youth Transformation Programme. Another contradiction—but that's Shahnaz Husain.





kal's Arya Vaidya Sala The best-selling ayurvedic medicines are once again non-essential items—general restorative tonics Chyavanprash—now a household name due to Dabur's advertising blitz—tops the list. The black gummy mixture—which takes its name from Chyavan *rishi*, who, according to ayurvedic lore, lived for a thousand years—is also believed to improve sexual vitality

All the same, it is ayurveda's capac-

ity to cure that evokes the greatest interest. Does it work? Can one depend on it? Ayurveds say that while most people are curious about these questions, they don't give the system a fair chance. A frequent complaint is that ayurveda is generally the last resort of the sufferer. Says Santosh Jalukar, a Bombay-based ayurvedic practitioner, indignantly: "I don't like it when people come to me after failing to find relief through other systems of medicine. The entire attitude of treating ayurveda as an alternative

form of medicine is very wrong." The problem with this attitude, according to Tibia College's P. P. Sharma, is that it is often much too late. "When patients come to us after every system has said 'no' to them, there is sometimes very little we can do. After having taken strong allopathic drugs for long, there is the chance that the body stops responding to mild herbal medicines."

Nevertheless, most *vaidyas* believe that ayurveda is a powerful and effective means of combating illness. Some

## ALL BOTTLED UP

*Kottakkal's Arya Vaidya Sala is the best in the business*

In 1902, a young Keralite called P.S. Varier who was acquainted with both the ayurvedic and allopathic systems purchased a small plot of land in Kottakkal—then a nondescript village some 50 kilometres from Calicut—for a sum of Rs 125. His purpose: to manufacture and supply reliable and standardised ayurvedic medicines to his patients at Kottakkal, his ancestral home.

Soon after he founded the Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal and its environs were ravaged by cholera. Varier—who had for long been trying to formulate an effective cure for the disease—began treating victims with his now well-known *vishuchikari* tablets. The pills were successful and he acquired the reputation of being a good physician in the region. Varier's yearly turnover when he started out was Rs 500, which well exceeded his expectations. When he died some 40 years later, the Arya Vaidya Sala—to which an ayurvedic college and a charitable hospital had been incorporated—had a monthly turnover of Rs 30,000.

By then, the Arya Vaidya Sala had already become well-known all over the country. But Varier couldn't have imagined that his institution—which he converted into a family trust in his will—would become regarded as a synonym for ayurvedic health care.

Today, the Arya Vaidya Sala sells a staggering Rs 20 crores of ayurvedic medicines a year—more than five times it did at the beginning of the decade. Over the years,



Chief physician P.S. Varier: making perfect herbal sense

the trust has opened six branches in Kerala, three in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, one in New Delhi and created a vast network of some 300 authorised agencies which sell its medicines at home and abroad.

The institute's 50-odd-roomed nursing home is permanently full

and it is impossible to find a place unless one books months in advance. Among its clients have been a host of VIPs: Buta Singh's wife was treated for cervical spondylitis when he was home minister; V.V. Giri used to drop by at a specially constructed helipad when he was President; the ailing Ramnath Goenka is a 'believer'; and his arch-rival Dhirubhai Ambani sought a consultation after going down with a stroke some four years ago.

The Arya Vaidya Sala specialises in treatment that is native to Kerala such as *pizhichil*, *dhara* and *sirovasty*, which are prescribed for a variety of ailments including arthritis, rheumatism, asthma, spondylitis and hysteria. The treatment usually consists of being bathed in

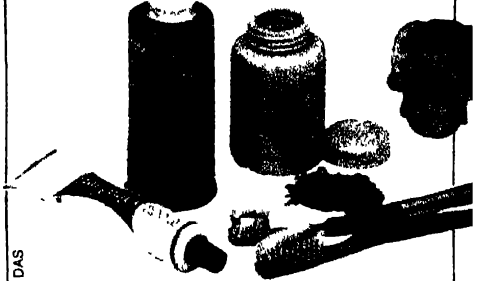
**Kottakkal's Arya Vaidya Sala: setting high standards**





claim it can cure just about anything. "Do you know?" asks Jalukar, "I have even treated a case of leukaemia and several cases of cancer which have shown good results." Others are somewhat more circumspect. The president of the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha (CCRAS), Dr V N Pandey, has isolated a list of 74 diseases which he thinks can be tackled by ayurvedic treatment. And although, as he admits, most *vaidyas* would consider this an insult to their science, his list

contains a few diseases that allopathy regards as fatal. Given the lack of clinical evidence to judge the conflicting claims, it is difficult to evaluate ayurveda's efficacy. But, there is a general consensus that the system is both successful and safe in treating a number of diseases for which allopathy can't do very much. Among ayurveda's biggest successes are ailments such as arthritis, asthma, hepatitis, colitis, etc. (see box for details) With respect to such illnesses, there is some evidence to establish that it is a



warm medicated oil and massaged by well-trained masseurs. Says P. S. Varier, the institute's chief physician, who shares the same name as the founder: "For these diseases, ayurveda—and our treatment in particular—has given more relief than other medical systems in the world."

The best-known and most popular medicines produced by Kottakkal institute are Chyavanprasham and Dasamoolaristham—both general, rejuvenative tonics. Although they are far more expensive than similar products made by commercial establishments such as Dabur, etc., together they account for a sizeable part of the Arya Vaidya Sala's annual sales. The management is proud of the fact that all its products are made strict-

ly in accordance with the procedures laid down by the classical texts. Chyavanprasham, for instance, contains all the 40-odd natural ingredients that the texts ordain and officials at the institute claim it is far better than the widely available commercial variants. ("The stuff you see advertised in the magazines and TV is just so much rubbish," says one.) And the black grapes used in Dasamoolaristham are imported all the way from Afghanistan. ("We use only the best and the ones we get at home aren't good enough.")

Apart from the nursing home and the ayurveda college, the Arya Vaidya Sala has a full-fledged R&D wing (where raw materials and formulations are checked on modern equipment to maintain

quality control), a publications division (which brings out, among other things, a bilingual journal) and a splendid eight-acre herbal garden (where specimens of various medicinal plants are grown, identified and classified).

Given the institute's constantly burgeoning sales and the trust's rules—which lay down that profits are ploughed back—the Arya Vaidya Sala is bound to grow even bigger. And if the care it takes over its medicines and treatment is maintained, it can only become even better.

better system than allopathy

All the same, the system does have its limitations. For one, it does not offer any anaesthetics and, therefore, provides no relief for anyone in pain. *Vaidyas* often make out that this is not a drawback and argue that pain is only a temporary manifestation of afflictions that ayurveda is more than capable of dealing with. But this 'why-worry-it's-only-pain attitude' is hardly comforting. Admits Kuldeep Raj Kohli: "The lack of anaesthetic drugs limits the freedom of the ayurved."

The other problem is the system's inability to deal quickly with acute infections. Although some *vaidyas* are willing to risk treating any disease, most will resort to antibiotics when faced with a case of acute pneumonia or meningitis. "In an emergency situation, it is not unnatural for an ayurved to indulge in a little allopathy," admits one.

Such limitations, ayurveds feel, have led some people to believe that while a combination of exotic herbs may be all right for coughs, colds and the like, they are useless for anything more serious. This assumption, they argue, is mistaken on many counts. As Calcutta's leading *kaviraj* Shih Kali Bhattacharya points out, ayurveda is not purely a herbal science. Medicines include metals such as gold, silver and zinc and poisons such as arsenic and snake venom (*sarpabisha*).

Besides, it is erroneous to conclude that herbal medicines are mild and, therefore, require prolonged use to take effect. Says Jalukar, "Who says that ayurvedic medicines are not powerful? In certain ailments, such as abdominal pain and discomfort, the relief can be instant." Ciba-Geigy's *vaidya* is also an advocate of the 'plants-are-powerful' school. "How many people know that aspirin was the result of long years of research on a plant of African origin? Or that the best drug for cardiac ailments—digita-

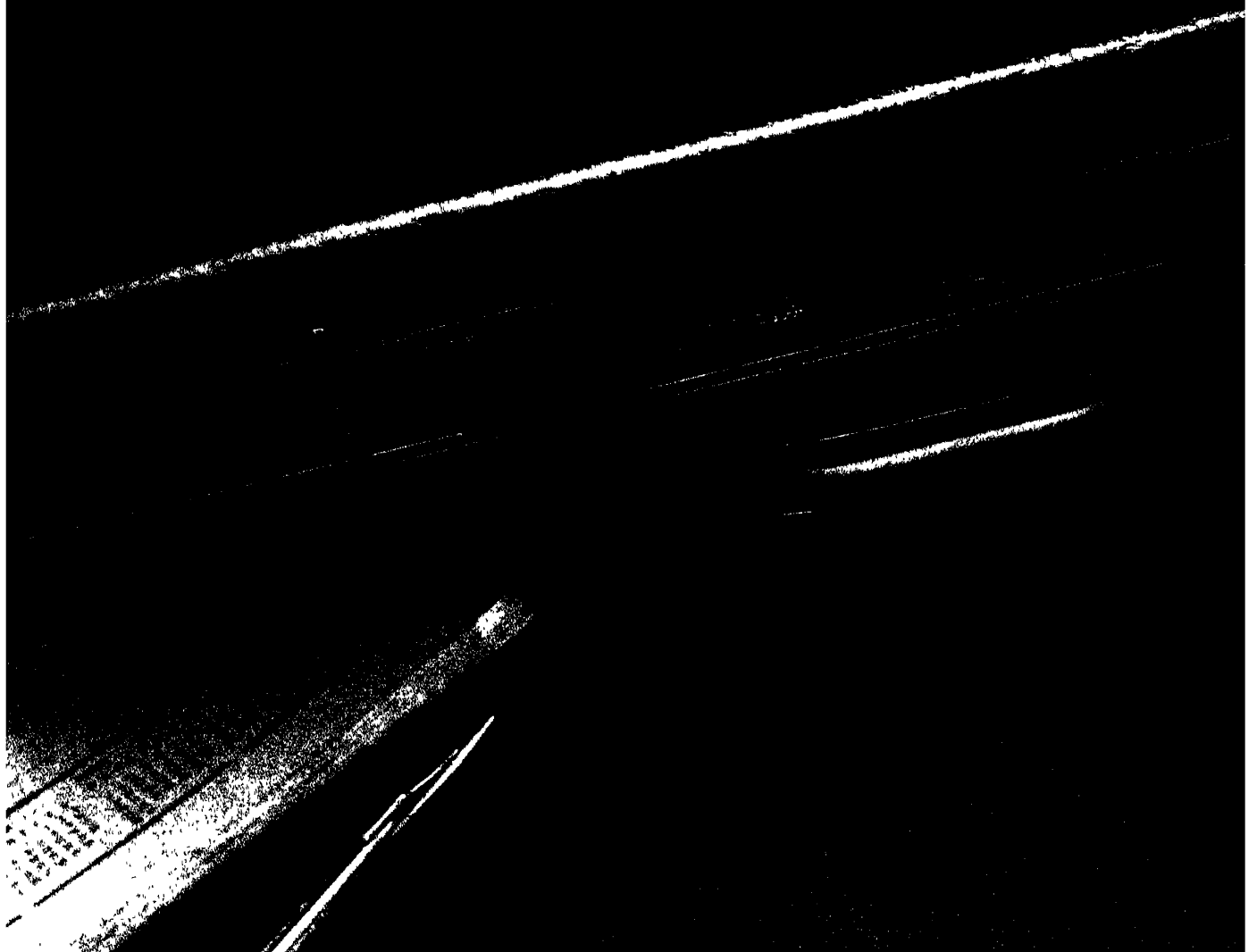
#### Botanist Indu Balachandaram: how does your garden grow?

MUKUND PADMANABHAN



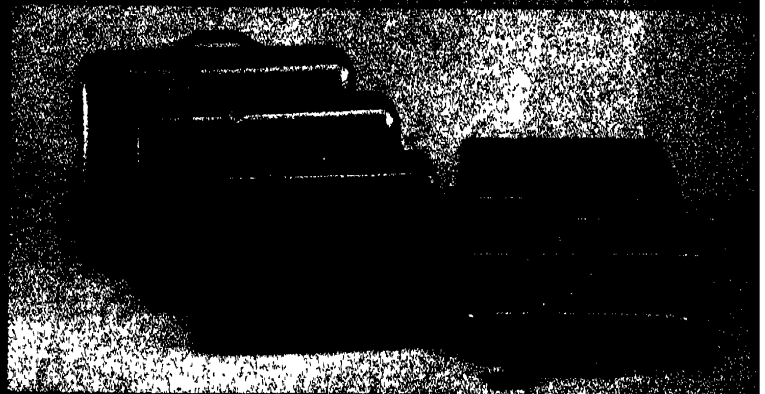


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that's worth a lot more than its looks.





111



*Is this tag on your bag?*

F D C M **VIP**



(continued from page 49)

his—is also derived from a plant?" he asks.

A visit to the splendid herbal garden at Kottakkal's Arya Vaidya Sala may well convince sceptics of the truth of 'plant power'. Managed by botanist Indu Balachandaran, the herbarium boasts of a staggering variety of plants from all over the country. In it are plants such as *laportia crenulata*, which—as those who dared have discovered—causes enlargement of the

glands and high fever when touched (The plant is known locally as *anamayakki* because elephants are said to stay well clear of it in Kerala's forests.) Then there are others such as *gymnema sylvestre*, which paralyses the taste buds when eaten or *cocculus hirsutus*, the juice of which solidifies water.

**B**ut ayurveda suffers from much more than just such misconceptions about the effectiveness of its formulations. Among its biggest prob-

lems is the existence of charlatans and frauds. In a sense, the system lends itself to the proliferation of quacks. For one, a large number of those who resort to ayurveda come from the lower and illiterate classes and they are easily taken in with the promise of miracle cures. For another, there is nothing which prevents a crook from setting up shop on a pavement, pretending to be an ayurvedic physician and flogging medicines to whoever will buy them. The result of the lack of control on these self-styled *vaidyas* is

## BALD FACTS

*Gopalakrishnan Nair's Anoop: miracle cure or just plain hair oil?*

**T**he way Gopalakrishnan Nair tells it, it all began one fortuitous day in the early Eighties. The former chemist was experimenting in his laboratory at home with coconut oil and a number of ayurvedic herbs. Accidentally, some drops of the mixture fell on his forearm. And, a few days later, there was—to his delight and surprise—a neat little patch of hair on the spot.

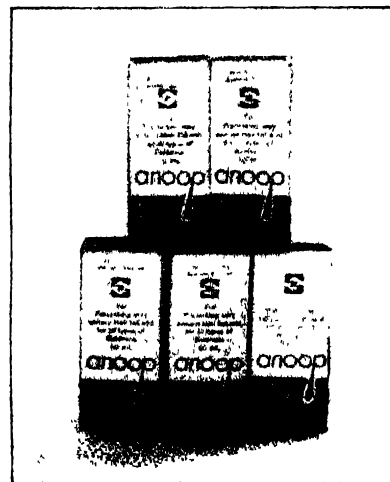
A short while later, he dared to use his concoction on his head and those of his four daughters. And found—to his even greater delight—that his daughters had developed shiny, long locks and that his own pate hadn't done too badly either. The wonder oil had worked!

In a year's time, the bespectacled Keralite was able to procure a manufacturing licence from the drugs controller in Trivandrum for his formula. And thus, Anoop was born.

The product took some time to become popular and for the first few years, Nair relied mainly on word-of-mouth publicity to fetch him customers. It was only after Kerala's number one daily, *Malayala Manorama*, featured him and his product on page one that Anoop started becoming the rage. Subsequently, other newspapers and magazines followed suit and by the time *The Illustrated Weekly of India* featured Nair on the cover in May last

year, Anoop was a household name with the nation's bald or balding population. The rumour that Rajiv Gandhi (then Prime Minister) used liberal quantities of it also did Anoop and its inventor no end of good.

Nair—whose 'manufacturing unit' consisted of four iron cauldrons in a backroom of his house in Trivandrum—was in big business. The 50 ml bottle of Anoop that he sold in the early Eighties for a mere Rs 10 was marked up to Rs 75. (In the black market, it fetched anything up to Rs 300.) At any given time of the day, there were



large queues of people outside his house, waiting—some even begging—to be sold the magic potion. The telephone never stopped ringing and there were said to be at least a lakh of people who sought appointments with him every month. In Kerala, MLAs began complaining bitterly that there were not enough bottles of Anoop to supply to their constituents, who had been pestering the legislators for them.

The pressure may have got to Nair. He requested and received police security and was hospitalised after a heart attack. But, there were more problems in store for him. In August last year, a writ petition seeking a stay on the sale of Anoop was admitted by the

**Nair with bottles of Anoop: standing by his invention**



all too evident. in virtually every Indian city, there are hundreds of 'dispensaries' on the streets which flog medicines for anything from indigestion to impotency. Many of those who run them use dangerous steroids to achieve results and keep the patients coming. Says Jalukar "More than 50 per cent of practising *vaidyas* are quacks."

The problem of suspect medicines doesn't end with street-corner dispensaries. There are few constraints placed on manufacturers of ayurvedic

Kerala High Court. The petition followed investigations made by a consumers' group, which claimed that the oil had no effect on baldness and comprised exactly the same ingredients as *neelabringadhi thailam*, an ayurvedic preparation which is popular in Kerala as a hair oil/nourisher. The group also claimed that Nair had flouted certain rules—for example, the ingredients used to make Anoop were not displayed on the bottles.

Questions about Anoop's efficacy began to be raised in the Kerala Assembly and Nair was subject to a series of tax raids. The state health ministry also instructed a director at the Central Council for Research on Ayurveda and Siddha (CCRAS) to submit a report on Anoop's 'hair-raising' abilities. Nair, who had enjoyed the reputation of being a medical magician, began to be perceived by many as a con-man and a crook.

Nair, however, stands by his invention. "I think that Anoop is the best thing that has happened to ayurveda in recent times," he told SUNDAY. But does it cure baldness? Yes, he maintained, but this depends on the condition of a person's hair follicles. "In those people whose hair follicles have not closed for good, Anoop can produce result."

Not many people believe such explanations today. But Nair—who has probably earned more thousands than he has hair on his head—behaves as if he doesn't care. And now, he is planning to make an ayurvedic medicine to cure cancer.

#### KULDEEP RAJ KOHLI

Doctor attached to Bombay's Podar Ayurvedic Hospital

**C**ompanies such as **Vicco, Balsara and Dabur** have contributed towards making more and more people aware of ayurvedic medicines. We should be thankful to them

products and concepts such as standardisation, quality control and laboratory testing are foreign to them. Last year, the Karnataka health department banned the sale of Sanjeevini, a widely-used drug for asthma, manufactured by a Bangalore-based ayurvedic firm, on the grounds that it contained allopathic ingredients. The manufacturer, Asthma Eradication Centre, is situated in a small lane in the city and has nothing more than a 'kitchen mix' facility. Yet, 180 ml bottles of Sanjeevini sold all over the country for Rs 100 each. The problem is that it is difficult to prosecute manufacturers of fraudulent ayurvedic products as the government has laid down no norms for the manufacture and sale of Indian medicines.

Some believe that the commercialisation of ayurvedic products has also led to their deteriorating quality. One common complaint is the excessive use of alcohol in certain formulations. While the ayurvedic texts lay down that alcohol content should never exceed 7-8 per cent, some medicines contain over 50 per cent. ("Heaven knows if they work, but they guarantee a high," says one practitioner.) Even Dabur's and Vaidyana's tremendously successful Chyavanprash have their critics. Says the CCRAS' V N Pandey "The ideal Chyavanprash mixture should have 46 herbs, but commercial manufacturers provide only between 30 and 32. *Banslochan*—the most important herb for the formulation—is seldom used as it is rare and expensive."

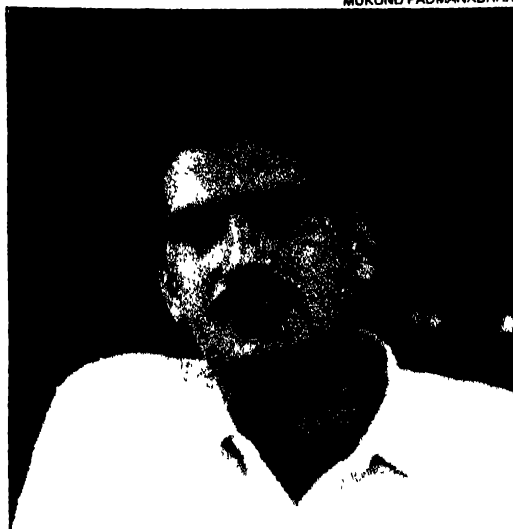
But even those traditional and reputed manufacturers who strive to follow the procedures prescribed by the texts have their problems. Says the Arya Vaidya Sala's botanist Indu Balachan-

dan "Industrialisation and the growth in population have led to a tremendous amount of deforestation. Nowadays, it is becoming increasingly difficult for manufacturers to find sufficient quantities of herbs. Some have already become unavailable." Another problem, according to Balachandaran, is that ayurvedic texts are usually vague when describing medicinal herbs and plants. She says this has led to two kinds of difficulties. "First, the manufacturer is sometimes supplied with the wrong plant. And second, different regions of the country use different plants in the manufacture of a product." Balachandaran believes that it is important to botanically identify and classify the plants mentioned in the ayurvedic texts.

Such problems have led men such as the CCRAS' Pandey to call for an "orderly change in the manner in which ayurvedic medicines are prescribed and manufactured." "There are about 15,000 formulations described in our classical texts and it is time we began laying down standards for their production," he says.

But even so, the trust that people display in ayurvedic medicines remains unshaken. For the believers, the *kaviraj* is not just a doctor, but a repository of ancient and profound truths about health care. And, as recent trends indicate, the ranks of the faithful are constantly burgeoning. For a science that is many centuries old, it is a conversion that has taken a long time coming. And, from all appearances, ayurveda is finally here to stay. •

**Mukund Padmanabhan/New Delhi, Bombay and Kottakkal with reports from Adite Chatterjee and Sreedhar Pillay**







COURTESY FEWNA

**Naveeda Medhi: Miss India to film debutante**

## ENGLISH HOLIDAY

The sleepy north England town of Newcastle Upon Tyne had a rather rude introduction to Bollywood, with director Prakash Varma invading it, cast and crew of his new film, *Princess From Kathmandu*, in tow.

The movie will, says Varma, be shot entirely in England, though not against the usual stereotyped background of Westminster Abbey and the Big Ben. Instead the likes of Kader Khan, Prem Chopra—complete with false moustaches and turbans—ham away bravely in the company of Miss India Naveeda Medhi, in the markets and quays of Newcastle.

Medhi plays the Kathmandu princess who arrives in England on a

state visit, and in a very *Roman Holiday* sort of move, runs away to many an adventure. Naveeda, whose maiden film this is, insists she accepted the role out of the hundreds offered because of its 'originality'. (One Audrey Hepburn-Gregory Peck starrer, obviously, does not count.)

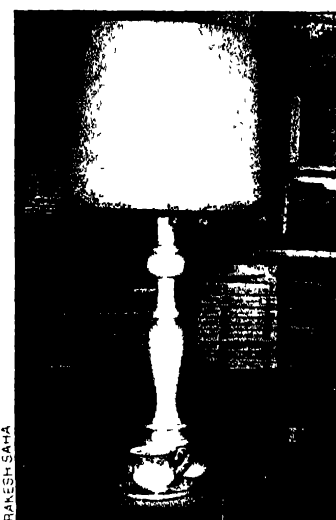
Shooting is now on at full swing with the regulation song and dance sequences providing the fantasy element, while director Varma cajoles bemused passers-by to intone a dialogue or two for the much-needed touch of authenticity.

If the venture proves a success, the producers intend making as many as two films every year from Newcastle. Talkies from the Tyne may be the latest thing yet.

## WHOSE VOICE IS IT, ANYWAY?

The voice-over was only too familiar. And listening to it hold forth on the situation in Kashmir, in a *Focus* programme titled *Dehshat*, viewers were convinced that Nalini Singh had notched up yet another success, after her hugely-popular programmes on poll rigging and the Bhalpur riots.

Well, this time they'd got it a little wrong. For, the attractive producer made it clear that she had nothing to do with *Dehshat*. She had, said Singh, only produced one programme—also



RAKESH SAHA

**Nalini Singh: prompt disclaimer**  
telecast in the *Focus* slot—called *Aaj Ka Kashmir*. And that had gone on the air on 27 May (*Dehshat* was telecast on 3 June).

*Dehshat*, according to Doordarshan sources, had been built around footage provided by

## THE ORDEAL CONTINUES

Salman  
Rushdie's

ordeals by *fatwa* may finally be over. Provided, of course, that the British government falls in with Iranian regime's line.

So everyone thought when in an interview to the *Sunday Times* in Tehran, Sayed Hussein Musavian, a top-ranking foreign ministry official, hinted that the order on Rushdie's execution would be rescinded, if Whitehall condemned the blasphemous *Verses*.

Musavian, a senior member of the Rafsanjani government, said: "If Douglas Hurd would make it clear that the

government of the United Kingdom respects Islam and Muslims and condemns insults to Islam, which is what Rushdie's book did, the biggest obstacle to Brit-

**Salman Rushdie: the amnesty doesn't include him**







Mandi House to Media Associates, the production concern set up by some students of the department of mass communications, Jamia Milia Islamia

And some of the clips provided had been from Singh's shows

ish-Iranian relations would be removed."

And Rushdie would, presumably, be a free man once again.

Not quite. For the Iranian regime clarified all too soon that the amnesia didn't cover Satanic Salman. And the sentence of death stood.



## ME KIMI, HE GAME

She left Mohnish Behl for *Tarzan*. And then Sunjay Dutt deserted her for the charms of Richa.

But Kimi Katkar finally found her match in star photographer Shantanu Sheorey, whom she married in a quiet ceremony at the US Club in Colaba, Bombay. In attendance at the Maharashtrian wedding—with Katkar much the demure bride—were the best-known newlyweds of filmdom, Rekha and Mukesh Aggarwal. Most of the other *filmi* types had to make do with invitations to the bash at Alibag (far away from the prying eyes of star-gazers) instead.

The Sheorey-Katkar courtship had been long, eventful, and often, verging on the edge of

disaster. The Bombay gossip mill had it that Shantanu, who ditched popular model-turned-photographer Malvika Tiwari for the light-eyed actress, was only out for a good time. And that Katkar would be best advised to silence the

strains of the *shehnai* sounding in her ear. But all those weekends in Alibag (while Kimi's producers tore their hair out) paid off.

It's now goodbye films.

And hello Kimi Sheorey.



At the wedding: Kimi and Shantanu go through the ceremonies

## OM SHANTI OM

From the Indian Rasputin to the nation's favourite yoga instructor to small-time cheat, matters have deteriorated with alarming rapidity for Swami Dharendra Brahmachari.

According to a criminal complaint filed against the Swami at the Parliament Street police station in the capital, Brahmachari had duped the students of his institute, Vishwayatan

Yogashram at Katra, Jammu. Apparently, the yogi put it about that the diploma and degree courses at his ashram had been duly 'recognised' by the govern-

**Swami Dharendra Brahmachari: duping innocents?**



ment. But, as the hapless students found out to their horror, only the 3-month certificate course had been approved by the authorities, the diplomas handed out on completion of the others were just so many worthless pieces of paper.

Additional commissioner of police (New Delhi range) R.K. Niyogi maintains that the Swami will be arrested if the allegations are found to be true. And this time there won't be any friends in high places to come to his aid. ●



# A maiden effort

*Bombay hosts the first women's festival in India*

**S**hould art imitate life? Or should it initiate change? Or again, enter the realm of activism? These were the issues that 120 women delegates debated and analysed during a four-day festival, Expression, organised by Madhushree Dutta, Neera Adarkar and other like-minded feminists, in Bombay between 2-5 June. It was the quest for a "feminist methodology"—which they felt had eluded art forms, though applied to politics, sociology and other spheres of modern-day life—that led them to think on the lines of organising a festival.

Besides hosting plays by six eminent theatre groups—including Nirakar and Vivadi from Delhi, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, Trivandrum, Cultural Centre, Madras, Spandana, Bangalore, Rangakarmee, Calcutta, and Majlish, Bombay—the festival also featured a books and art exhibition. Seminars were also organised to review and debate the merits of works by women in different art forms. Even so, Dutta emphasises that it wasn't just a "feminist festival". According to her: "There has been a need to put together certain women's issues which have been raised by the artiste and the activist." The motive behind holding a festival of this nature, she stresses, is to "provide a critique of women's culture".

In the process of articulating women's concerns, says Dutta, certain visual symbols have evolved, to become an integral part of the feminist movement. For instance, the identification of Shakti as a feminist symbol and its wide usage by activists all over the country. This has, however, given rise to a controversy. Dutta explains, "Some people feel that Shakti is a Hindu symbol and by resorting to it, the feminist movement is excluding the minorities from the movement."

But such controversies have never been looked into, nor has any effort been made to determine the impact of women's active participation in the arts on the state, its economy, culture and other related fields. What prompted feminists like Dutta to get together and create a forum for discussion on these issues was the realisation that in the absence of any such effort the

works of an entire generation of women artistes would go unappreciated.

Expression made it possible for practitioners of traditional art and folk forms to share their experiences. And several humorous insights emerged from their recounting. For instance, C.S. Laxmi, a Tamil writer recalled the response of two male authors to her work. Said one "The problem with her is that she hasn't had a good sexual experience. If she had, she would be writing other stuff." While recalling this incident, Laxmi commented, "Feminism, in the opinion of these guys, is a disease which can be

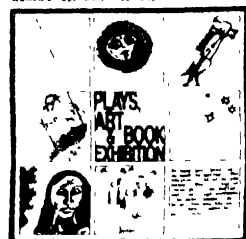
contemporaries but also probed into their attitude to society.

As Swaroop Dhruv, Gujarati poetess, pointed out "The works of most Gujarati women writers in the post-Gandhian era may have been socially relevant but none of them ever questioned the values or the system which exploited women. In fact, there was very little literature of protest. Women came out to express but never to protest." This was the reason, she feels, why works by women have been "branded women's literature and could never make the leap into mainstream literature." At the other extreme, some women authors bent over



## EXPRESSION

WOMEN'S CULTURAL FESTIVAL JUNE 2-5, 1980



PRITHVI THEATRE & SARVODAYA HATTYA MANDIR BOMBAY

**Expression:**  
evolving a  
feminist  
methodology

cured if certain symptoms are removed."

The sessions in which the literary works of women writers were discussed, also turned out to be a cathartic experience. The women authors present not only analysed the works and contribution of their predecessors and

backwards to avoid being branded 'feminist' and even imitated the styles of their male counterparts.

Once Expression winds to a close Dutta and the other organisers will review the response, and decide whether the festival should be an annual event. As Neera Adarkar puts it: "We wanted a dialogue at various levels. But whether this will lead to anything else is something which we haven't yet thought about."

But it is only as a regular feature, that Expression can hope to make some contribution to the feminist cause. If it remains a one-off effort, it will be dismissed as just another *tamasha*—though a slightly more pretentious one. •

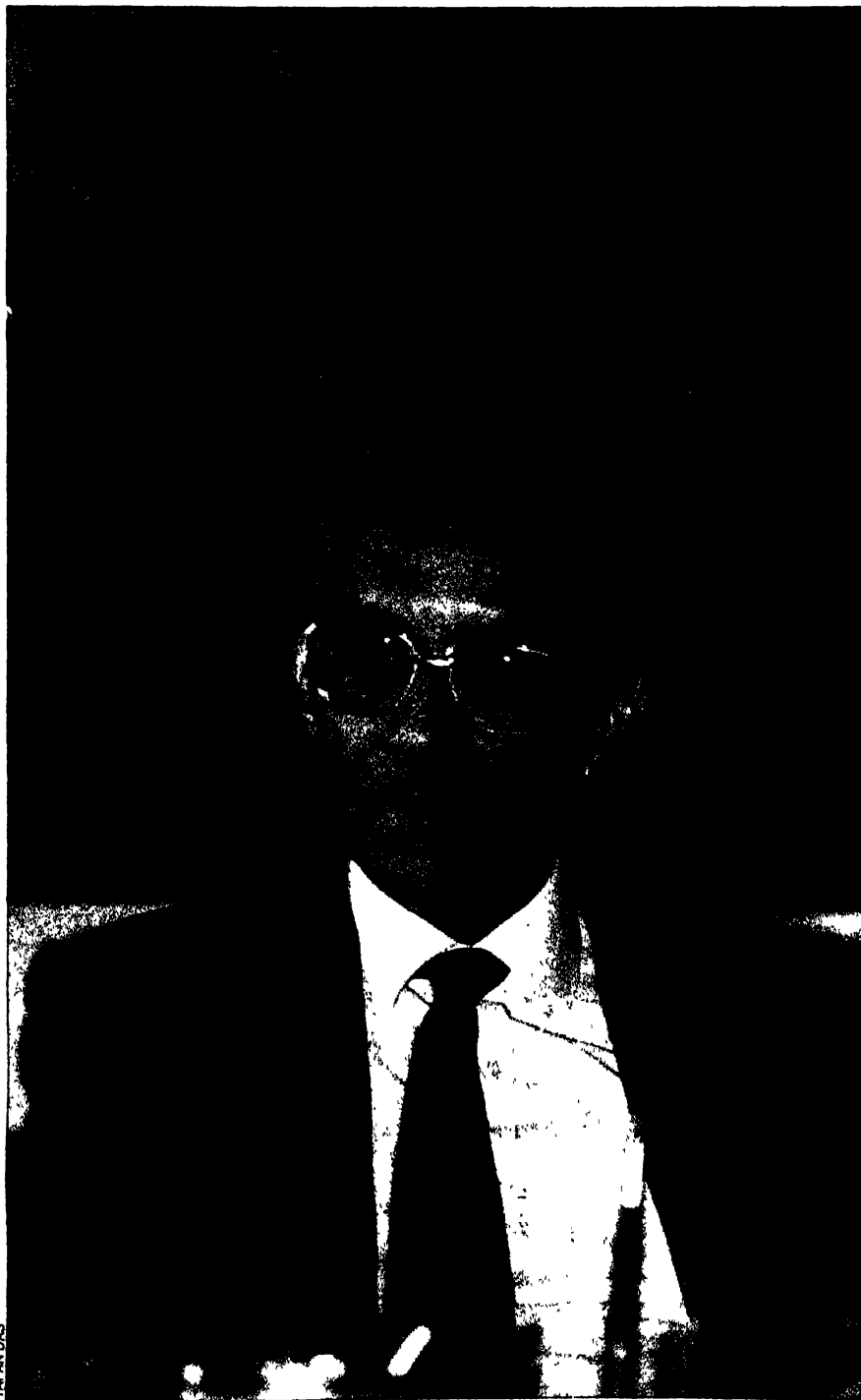
**Adite Chatterjee/Bombay**



INTERVIEW

# "I am keen to expand"

*B.K. Birla on the future, his successor and the Tatas*



*Basant Kumar Birla, 69, is one of India's most powerful and respected industrialists. After the break-up of the Birla family assets, BK and his son Aditya emerged as the front-runners (1989-90 sales turnover totalling Rs 5,300 crores for the group) of the divided house. According to numerous corporate observers, the BK-Aditya team is the most dynamic one among the Birlas. Last fortnight, BK met SUNDAY's Debjani Sinha in Calcutta. The tycoon was in turn nostalgic, prophetic, introspective and always, frank. Excerpts from the interview*

**SUNDAY:** What is your reading of the country's industrial future?

**B.K. Birla:** I think the outlook is good, and industries are expanding. The government is helpful—for in the last five years, many institutions, that is financial institutions, are now operating in the market and one has no problem now in obtaining money, either in the form of equity or debentures or both. Ten years ago, even for the Tatas and Birlas, it was a problem to get money. I remember father (Ghanshyam Das) was very particular to see that he implemented only one project at a time and liked to make sure that he had plenty of money, in case there was a project overrun, or in case the project did not materialise. For this head of emergency, he would ensure that he had plenty of funds. But now in the last five years, many institutions are operating in the market which are very anxious to underwrite public issues, debentures etc. Moreover, the present government is also helpful, the government also feels that industry has to expand.

**Q:** But that was a legacy of the previous government.

**A:** Very true. But we were afraid, the share market was afraid, that the present government would change the policies. But it is clear that the present government is anxious that industry should grow. For instance, I saw in the papers that the power sector is being



opened up to the private sector. This is encouraging—what is needed is for all sectors to grow the joint sector, assisted sector, private sector.

**Q: These are the positive aspects. What changes do you think have happened in the industrial scene in the course of your career?**

**A:** One significant change is that old industries are now becoming somewhat out of date. The new industries of today are fertilisers, petrochemicals...

**Q: Old industries meaning jute and tea?**

**A:** Jute, tea, textiles, etc.

**Q: Surely, you cannot allow them to die.**

**A:** No, but the future growth or expansion, it seems, will be through the new capital-intensive industry route. For instance, the Haldia project means an investment of Rs 60,000 crores. There is no doubt that industrialists, especially the important ones, are anxious to be in this sector

**Q: The sunrise sector?**

**A:** From the point of view of prestige, the cost, and volume of these projects, this sector is proving to be very attractive. For instance, there is already a queue for Haldia—whether the clearances have been obtained as yet are not important, but four or five industrial groups are anxious to get into Haldia.

**Q: So, this is in your opinion the fashionable sector.**

**A:** What is important is that money is now available for projects. Earlier, for much smaller projects of say Rs 50 crores, it was impossible to get the money. Today, for projects ten times that size, money is available. Secondly, these are industries of the future. Growth in the jute sector and the textile sector cannot be unlimited but the possibility of expansion is almost unlimited in this (petrochemicals) sector. Aditya, for instance, started Indo-Gulf—one expansion of that will mean Rs 800 crores and it takes practically the same energy and time to control

an industry of Rs 50 crores or Rs 800 crores. So, industrialists will naturally choose to concentrate their energies on these (sunrise) sectors.

**Q: What are the changes for the worse?**

**A:** Today, there are so many institutions controlled directly or indirectly by the government. One institution is buying, another is selling, but gradually the (equity) holdings of these institutions are increasing. And as it is happening now, and as it happened in

ment institutions must be somewhat careful. I am not saying that loans ought not to be given to industrial houses that are not very well known, but they should be careful.

**Q: What is the high point of your career?**

**A:** I joined industry passively in 1936 and actively in 1938. From the point of view of size, Century Enka and Century Textiles are two companies that have shown good results consistently. But if you ignore the size, Jayshree Tea and Kesoram Industries are also very good examples of well-managed companies. I would like to place these companies at the top

**Q: As examples of well-managed companies?**

**A:** These are not only well-managed, but in terms of their size, profitability, sales and efficiency, all these factors combined make these outstanding concerns. But, in spite of being well-managed, some companies like Kesoram have suffered due to bad luck.

Our cement plant is in Hyderabad, (Andhra Pradesh), has 80 per cent power cuts. We do have our own generating capacity to the extent of 40-45 per cent, but 80 per cent power cuts affect the efficiency of the company and this is due to no fault of our

own. Then, the textile mill (Kesoram), happens to be in Calcutta and due to labour trouble it was closed for two years and nine months. On the other hand, a textile mill in Bombay, also under me, is making plenty of money. So you see, some things are within our power, and some things are not. There are other problems also. Once a company is affected by labour trouble, you will not be able to attract good managers. In Century, we have no problem in getting good managers. In Kesoram, we cannot get good managers. So, it becomes a vicious circle.

**Q: What are your plans for these companies?**

**A:** I am expanding these companies.



**“Ten years ago, even for the Tatas and Birlas, it was a problem to get money. Now, one has no problem in obtaining it”**

the past, they can dictate their own terms. As, for example, it happened in the case of DCM, or the Modis. My son recently issued a statement that they (financial institutions) should be allowed to invest only up to 25 per cent of the equity of any company. I entirely agree with that. There should be a limit on how much all financial institutions combined should be allowed to invest in a company. The second thing is that the easy availability of money is not always a good thing. People tend to become over-optimistic, and over-trading and such activities can take place. Over-trading is always bad, and this in the hands of people who are inexperienced or whose integrity is in question can be dangerous. Therefore, the govern-



Kesoram has a tyre plant which we hope will go into production in about ten months. Century Textiles has expansion projects. We have established a new company to manufacture polyester yarn. As far as possible, I would like to concentrate on expanding and consolidating my existing companies. I am not in favour of going into new companies or new greenfield projects. I am too old for that. That I leave to the younger generation.

**Q: The image of the Birlas is that of a conservative business house that will not venture into certain areas such as consumer durables and hotels. Has this changed? Will the younger generation be different?**

**A:** It is a fact that to a certain extent we are conservative. But in Gwalior Rayon for instance, we are manufacturing a range of textiles that is the best in India, as indeed in Century Textiles. My nephew S K Birla controls Digjam which manufactures first rate textiles. So to say that we (Birlas) are not in the consumer market is not quite correct. Hindustan Motors today has the Contessa, which is probably the best car in that segment of the market.

**Q: But the fact remains that members of the family are expected to conform to the family image. Isn't this a strain on the younger generation?**

**A:** I don't think so. We elders at least are somewhat conservative. Even now, we don't dance or drink. What happens in the future will depend on our children and their children.

**Q: There is always a comparison made between the Tatas and Birlas. Is this fair?**

**A:** We, at least I myself, like the Tatas. Their hotels are excellent. TELCO is an outstanding company. Tisco has made very good progress in the last five years. In fact, there is room for both Tatas and Birlas (to improve). We don't compete and we are not unduly excited either about comparisons of assets, etc.—one year they are ahead, another year it is us. Even assuming that there is healthy competition, I don't think there is any objection to that. My son is close to Ratan Tata, Russi Mody is our old friend in Calcutta. They are good people and we are friends.

**Q: The B.K. Birla group has emerged as the single largest in the Birla empire. Some people believe you had a**



**Aditya Birla: heir and master**

**headstart as your father's favourite. Please comment.**

**A:** It is true that we, Aditya and myself, did get a major chunk of father's industries. But why did he give this to us? What was in his mind is for you people to assess. But the fact remains that even after Aditya was handed all those industries, he has not only been able to maintain them, he has also expanded them.

**Q: You mean your father felt that the managerial expertise was there.**

**A:** Well, something like that. Father expired in 1983. Now it is 1990. What has to be examined is what progress has been made, what is the track record of these industries in that period. In my case, I did not get anything from the family except two mills. I got Kesoram in 1938-39 and the textile section of Century in 1983. All other companies I started on my own. All the other divisions of Century I have started. Century is my creation, so is Jayshree Tea and

others. Gwalior Rayon and Hindalco father gave to Aditya, but he has expanded these.

**Q: Which is the number two Birla group?**

**A:** That is up to you to assess.

**Q: Today, you and your son together form a formidable industrial force. What accounts for this success?**

**A:** His (Aditya's) knowledge of accounts is very solid. When he came back to India, I ensured that he spent plenty of time in understanding accounts. I myself was trained in the accounts department of Kesoram for ten months. I wrote cash books, did everything by my own hand. He is also very hardworking. He sometimes works from 7 am to midnight and at weekends, if necessary. I come to the office at 9 am and I am the only one there. And it's good because there are no phone calls or visitors for two hours and you can get all your work done.

**Q: You and your son are collaborating for the first time. Will this set a trend for the future?**

**A:** What trend? I am 70 and he has his whole life before him. I am not keen to grow anymore, but whatever companies I am controlling, I am keen to expand those. Otherwise, I will be unfair to my shareholders.

**Q: There have been some setbacks. Mangalam Timber, for example, has not done as well as it should have. What went wrong?**

**A:** Firstly, it was over-optimism. Secondly, we had some unexpected initial problems, especially with regard to quality. We had built up tremendous expectations in the mar-

**“It is true that we, Aditya and myself, did get a major chunk of father's industries...what was in his mind is for you people to assess”**



ket and the actual product was not as good as we had anticipated. Then, we had some problem with the workers. I can give you ten arguments to justify why the company did not work, but frankly speaking, I think all these mistakes are ours. Shareholders have invested in this company because they have faith in me, my background, my prestige, and in case the enterprise is not a success, the mistake is mine. I am trying my best to improve the performance of this company.

**Q: Century Textiles, on the other hand, seems to be doing quite well...**

**A:** All the different divisions of Century are working very efficiently. In business today, the most important thing is efficiency in working. If you have achieved that, you are cushioned against bad times.

**Q: All expansions under the Century umbrella have taken place from the company's internal resources. Why did you not go to the public?**

**A:** Our shareholders are not in favour of that. If the shareholders had approved the issue of convertible debentures, we would have expanded faster. But it would have meant that our own investment in the company would have gone down and this the shareholders do not want.

**Q: Would you say your managerial style is distinct from your father's, and perhaps old-fashioned, compared to your son's?**

**A:** I would not say that because basically, I was trained by my father and his training, on the whole, was very good. We can't obviously be identical, but I suppose for my father, myself and my son, essentially the style of functioning is the same—though the emphasis may be different. Perhaps, I give more importance to financial control, and perhaps, my son gives more importance to technical know-how. But otherwise, I suppose we are very similar in our approach. He works hard, I work hard. When I visit the factories, I work from 7 am to 8 pm, and in case Mrs Birla is not with me, I work until midnight. When she is there, she controls me, and insists that I complete my day by 9 pm. But when she is not there, I am decontrolled.

**Q: The division of assets in the Birla group was at one time the subject of a great deal of speculation. Was there a great deal of tension?**

**“Our shareholders are not in favour (of Century going public)...it would have meant that our own investment in the company would have gone down”**

**A:** Essentially, the whole thing was done in a spirit of cooperation. In dealing with assets of this nature and size, some arguments are bound to take place. But we were able to work out a solution which was acceptable, more or less, to most members of the family. What is important is that after this session, the relationships amongst members in the family are very cordial.

**Q: How did you work out a solution?**

**A:** The first round of suggestions was made by me. Then, there were modifications and changes. You see, for a thing of this nature, you have to have an exchange of views and incorporate suggestions from everyone.

**Q: For such a large family, to incorporate so many views it must have taken a long time.**

**A:** It took us almost two years.

**Q: What direction will the B.K. Birla group take in the near future?**

**A:** I alone or Aditya also? If you take the group as a whole, Aditya is actively looking at the possibility of expansion into petrochemicals, fertilisers and all kinds of new industries apart

**“I like the Tatas. Their hotels are excellent. TELCO is an outstanding company. TISCO has made very good progress in the last five years”**

from textiles and cement. Tyres in my case. But not everything is in our hands. We need licences, permissions and as it happens today, when we explore ten industries, we can probably get permission for only two or three.

**Q: You must have thought about it, the companies that are directly controlled by you will obviously in the near future go to your son or grandson Kumar-amangalam.**

**A:** I have not as yet worked it out, but I suppose these will go to my son or grandson. I have ample time to think it out, or I think I have ample time to work things out.

**Q: Will Haldia change the face of West Bengal as everybody says it will?**

**A:** I think it is going to help us a lot, especially the entry of the Tatas. Tatas with their headquarters in Bombay coming to Calcutta is a tremendous thing—psychologically speaking. I only hope the power position will improve.

**Q: What will be your advice to young industrialists of today?**

**A:** The first thing is that you have to be hardworking. But I find that with this generation, hard work is not appreciated very much. In fact, it is a sort of joke that I work and am willing to work over the weekend. But if at my age I am working ten hours a day—the younger generation should be prepared to work at least three or four hours longer. Then, in their business dealings, they must observe a very strict code of conduct and prove their integrity to their shareholders.

**Q: Your art collection is legendary. How many years have you spent on your collection?**

**A:** We started in the Fifties. In the beginning, we were collecting European and Eastern artefacts. At that time, most collectors were buying jade and Chinese art objects. Then, two of our very close friends suggested that we should buy Indian art and that is how we started. This collection has grown over the last 30 years. Now, we are buying contemporary Indian art. I am very pleased that my grandson and his wife are also keen art lovers. Marg has brought out a publication, *A Collector's Dream*, edited by Saryu Doshi and Karl Khandalavala, based on our collection. But it took them six months to believe that Birlas had such a collection. ●





RAKESH SAHAJ

## CIVIL AVIATION

# Reaching for the sky

*Vayudoot takes advantage of government policy and grounded Indian Airlines Airbus A320s to make a bid for the big time*

**A**n "open sky" policy, permission to operate on heavy passenger traffic sectors and full government support. Vayudoot Ltd could not have asked for more. After accumulating losses—and often generating controversy than revenue—for the six years it has been in existence, India's third-level airline is, for the moment, on a smooth flight path. With a little help from the government, Indian Airlines and an ambitious, fast-thinking chief executive.

On 11 April, civil aviation minister Arif Mohammad Khan announced a policy that opened up commercial aviation to virtually anyone with

planes to fly—both for domestic and international operators flying to India. The policy also freed the skies for more cargo flights. Added to this was the fact that IA has a grounded fleet of 14 Airbus A320 aircraft, out of action since one of them crashed in Bangalore four months ago. Grounding the A320s meant that IA had 30 per cent less seating capacity to offer, flying 22,000 passengers a day now as against 29,500 before the crash. (The move is reportedly costing IA Rs 2.5 crores a week in lost revenue.) And last fortnight, IA advertised for leasing out the 14 A320s, as well as putting four more it is due to receive on the block.

Vayudoot stepped in. In mid-May, the airline inaugurated a Delhi-

Bombay flight with a Boeing 727 jet aircraft leased from Royal Nepal Airlines Corp (RNAC), a departure from its standard fare—hopping flights to small cities and towns on small propeller-driven planes. By the last week of May, Vayudoot had added the Delhi-Bangalore route, and a few days later, a flight from Delhi to Guwahati. By year-end, the airline plans to go international and add cargo flights to its repertoire.

"As soon as we had got permission to operate on the Bombay and Bangalore routes," says Harsh Vardhan, Vayudoot's managing director, "we contacted RNAC." The Nepalese carrier helped out with a 727: it had enough aircraft but not enough of its





**HARSH VARDHAN**  
Vayudoot managing director

**“There is a vast untapped market in the country,” says Vardhan. “An attempt has been made to fill in the void. And if we can do it profitably, why not”**

**ARIF MOHAMMAD KHAN**  
Union civil aviation minister

**Arif Mohammad Khan has announced a policy that opens up commercial aviation to virtually anyone with planes to fly**



own routes to fly them on. RNAC also leased Vayudoot a Boeing 757 (the same plane IA junked in favour of the A320). Both aircraft are on a “wet lease”, which means that maintenance of the planes and providing pilots would be RNAC’s responsibility. Adds Vardhan, “We are negotiating with a few parties to get more aircraft on wet lease, because that is the fastest way of augmenting capacity in the market.”

Vardhan had been pushing the idea with aviation minister Arif for months. With reason: Vayudoot’s losses total Rs 11 crores, according to senior civil aviation ministry officials. It is saddled with outmoded and uneconomical HS 748s and Fokker F-27s

from IA, and a collection of fairly problem-ridden 19-seater Dornier planes.

**V**ayudoot had two options. One was to break into a bigger market, and the second, to utilise its capacity better. With the aircraft on hand, both were difficult to achieve. Recognising this, last year the airline made an attempt to acquire two 120-seater Yak 42 jets from the USSR, but it did not work out. “Somehow,” says Vardhan, “the project got delayed and the offer was withdrawn. Also hanging fire is a Rs 450 crore proposal to purchase 24 50-seater planes. As of now, the top contenders are the ATR 42, a joint venture between Aerospa-

the Dutch Fokker 50 and British Aerospace’s ATP 70. This proposal is currently awaiting the Public Investment Board’s clearance. But Vardhan is hopeful. Says he, “In the current financial year we expect to induct eight to ten aircraft in the smaller category.”

However, admits Vardhan, replacing the Fokkers and 748s will not be easy. At least not till the 50-seater planes arrive. “But then,” he says, “we feel that if we operate ten or so 100-seater aircraft (the 727 and 757 are both 100-plus capacity planes), that capacity would probably help to reduce the overhead base.” The bigger aircraft could help subsidise operations with smaller aircraft. And that, adds Vardhan, “is important.”

In fact, it could be crucial. Due to scarce traffic and too many destinations, Vayudoot’s small-scale flights have always notched up losses. But the Delhi-Bombay route took just six weeks to show profits of Rs 80,000 a day. Despite the airline charging almost Rs 400 less than IA’s fare of Rs 1,511. However, the Delhi-Bangalore operation, which offers a Rs 128 per seat discount, is losing Rs one lakh a day. Vayudoot officials, however, deny this.

Vayudoot will continue to lease the RNAC planes for the next two years. Says Vardhan, “With leasing we want to generate enough cash surplus so that finally we can start funding the cost of acquiring new aircraft. Leasing may be the answer for a year or two. But eventually, you have to go in for your capacity development.” Ministry officials agree. And besides an opportunity to generate revenue, they say, Vayudoot must keep in mind that it cannot continue to bank on passengers left in the lurch by IA. After all, they say, when good sense strikes the government, IA will have to reintroduce its A320 services.

“We are trying to create a market for our own needs,” insists Vardhan. “Leaving aside the gap created by the grounding of the A320s, there is a vast untapped market in the country, and even in the international sectors, a large number of new destinations are emerging (for Indian carriers). Somewhere, an attempt has to be made to fill in the void. And if we can do it profitably in our own limited way, why not?”

Why not, indeed? The question is: can Vayudoot—and Vardhan—pull it off? ●

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**



## ■ Waivers, again

As if fusing the budget exercise with poll promises wasn't bad enough. Declaring that the country was broke, finance minister Madhu Dandavate and his motley crew went ahead with increased taxation, but decided, in an apparent stroke of practicality, to keep loan waivers to a minimum. Rs 10,000 waivers for farmers, artisans and weavers stuck, with the proviso that it was meant for people who owed Rs



**Madhu Dandavate: waivering?**

10,000 or less. But now, waivers have been extended to people who owe more than Rs 10,000—obviously, meant for the better off. This scheme should knock more than Rs 3,000 crores off the government's kitty for the current year, and push the country deeper into debt. It's strange how the government keeps hurting itself repeatedly. It is already in trouble with money, and ministers' motives. If only politicians were to realise that there is more to government than pampering the rural rich. Then again, the rural rich hold the key to the vote bank. And, as far as this government is concerned, the key to its stability

## STOCK QUOTE

**"The Tatas and Birlas are dedicated socialists."**

*A senior West Bengal government official, at Writers Building, Calcutta*

## ■ Incommunicado

It could be carrier pigeon time again. The country has barely recovered from being held hostage by striking junior telecom engineers—whose

high. Six lakh employees of the department of telecommunications have threatened to go on an indefinite strike from 25 June, demanding more money, promotional avenues and better facilities at work, much the same things the engineers went on the warpath for. If the government gives in to the new demands, the strike may be averted. But if it doesn't, India's telecom system is going to be hit worse than it was in end-May. Moreover, the monsoon is on its way, a traditional time for nature-prompted telecom mayhem. It's a bizarre alliance, striking workers and rainfall, and the two together are enough to create an enduring nightmare.

## EVENT OF THE WEEK

### End of the Indo-Nepal trade dispute



**K.P. Bhattarai**

• It took a change of political priorities, both in India and Nepal, to bring this about. Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai met his Indian

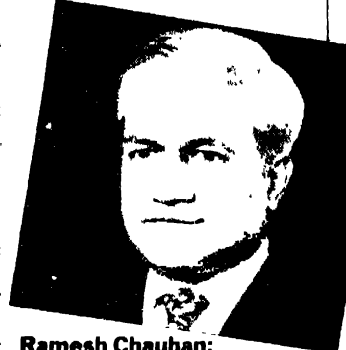


**V.P. Singh**

counterpart, V.P. Singh, in New Delhi last week to end the year-long fracas. India has agreed to reopen all 15 border transit points. After the transit treaty expired last year, only two points, Raxauli and Jogahani, remained open. Nepal, in turn, will end discrimination against Indian nationals working there and ease off tariff restrictions on Indian goods. And, most importantly, keep an eye on its relationship with China. Here's to *detente*

## ■ BVO bashing

It's clear. The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) is convinced that Parle Ltd's soft drinks contain brominated vegetable oil (BVO), a proven carcinogenic that the West has junked for decades. Parle, India's top soft drinks company, is as convinced—at least that's what its latest advertising blitz says—that they do not contain even a trace of BVO. Limca and Gold Spot, Parle's premier



**Ramesh Chauhan: tough spot**

products, are at the centre of the BVO imbroglio. As of now, the MRTPC hasn't budged an inch, and Parle hasn't stopped selling the drinks all over the country. But if the government agency gets tough and decides to ban the sale of Limca and Gold Spot, Parle will be in big trouble. Its main competitor, Pure Drinks, has cleared its name with the government, and Parle's crisis would only add to its sales. Besides, it would give some relief to Pepsi Foods Private Ltd, which is launching a cola soon, as a ham-strung Parle means that its chief executive, Ramesh Chauhan, would be immediately on the defensive. Chauhan is a top Pepsi basher. Only, this time round, he could be the one getting bashed.



# Is the party over?

*As Congressmen in Tamil Nadu quarrel, the DMK strengthens its position*

**T**he Sri Sankara Bhaktha Jana Sabha in Kanchipuram, near Madras, was all set to celebrate the 97th birthday of the senior Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt in great style. Congress(I) president Rajiv Gandhi was to attend the festivities on 7 June and address the gathering. Invitation cards and wall posters announcing this had already been printed, when suddenly infighting in the Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress(I) threatened to mar the proceedings.

The hue and cry over the matter of names on invitation cards illustrates the extent of factionalism in the Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress. It is not surprising then that the affairs of the party in the state are in complete disarray. Accusations and counter-accusations, public demands to remove Ramamurthy from the presidency and threats from the PCC(I) chief to his opponents that he would adopt harsh measures to deal with them have created an unstable political scenario in the state Congress(I). After the party's dismal show in the

approved the selection because all of them had one common enemy—Moopanar.

Now, however, the same leaders have turned against Ramamurthy as they feel that their own interests are at stake. "We feel that Ramamurthy was only trying to build up a base for himself in the state unit, rather than strengthening the party in general. He began packing the district committees and other outfits with his own Vanniya caste members or those whose loyalties have already been tested under him in the INTUC (Indian National

What brought the factionalism to the fore was the fact that the organisers of the birthday celebrations had omitted the name of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy from the list of invitees printed in the card. Under different circumstances, Ramamurthy would have let this slip pass, especially since his party boss Rajiv



**V.K. Ramamurthy**

"It is very unfortunate that Moopanar continues to stay away from the Assembly"

"The party is doing fine," quips the former PCC(I) chief



**G.K. Moopanar**

Gandhi was the chief guest. But what angered him was the fact that though his name had been left out, that of his arch-rival and former All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary G. K. Moopanar featured in the list.

The PCC(I) chief's supporters dropped broad hints that unless the organisers took corrective measures, they would sabotage the function by weaning away the audience to another public meeting which would be addressed by Rajiv Gandhi. The harassed organisers were forced to print a fresh set of invitation cards and wall posters that announced that Ramamurthy would also grace the occasion.

January 1989 Assembly elections, various anti-Moopanar groups demanded his removal from the post of the party chief. As the then PCC(I) president, Moopanar had decided to go it alone without forming an alliance with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). When the party lost, his critics alleged that it was this blunder which had led to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK's) massive victory.

When President R. Venkataraman backed Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy as Moopanar's successor to the presidency of the state unit of the Congress, party leaders such as Maragatham Chandrashekhara, K. Thangabalu and Vyjayanthimala Bali had

Trade Union Congress), said a senior Congressman. He added: "We have told both Rajivji and H.K.L. Bhagat about this. And I know that Ramamurthy has been pulled up for his methods of functioning." Said another top party functionary in Madras: "Ramamurthy has been bulldozing his way all along. Now we have got an assurance from Bhagat that he will not be allowed to go on that way any more."

This appears to be a hasty claim. After Rajiv Gandhi's announcement that the AICC will soon hold organisational elections, the PCC(I) chief in Madras is, apparently, making sure that the district units, as well as the



state unit, are packed with his own nominees

**T**he Ramamurthy-Moopanar hostility goes back a long way, but it became acute only after the former issued a strongly-worded statement blaming his rival for the party's debacle in the Assembly elections. Moopanar had hoped that the party high command would pull up Ramamurthy, if not for the content, then for the language of the statement. But Rajiv Gandhi ended up making Ramamurthy the PCC(I) president. With most of the 26 Congress MLAs in the present state Assembly owing allegiance to Moopanar, it soon became clear that the Tamil Nadu PCC(I) would have little or nothing to do with the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) headed by Moopanar.

Given this, the DMK government led by Karunanidhi should consider itself extremely lucky. Not only did it win because of the split in the anti-DMK votes, it still continues to benefit from the differences in the Congress(I) ranks. Another factor that goes in the DMK's favour is the absence of Jayalalitha from active politics. While it could be argued that Jayalalitha had a reason to boycott the Assembly after the assault on her inside the House in March 1989, there seems to be no justifiable excuse for the absence of CLP leader Moopanar from the legislature.

Moopanar, for his part, does not seem to be perturbed by this allegation. He contends that his party has been effectively discharging its responsibilities as the Opposition in the legislature. "They are doing fine, aren't they?" he quipped, when questioned about his long absence from the Assembly.

**"If Jayalalitha sneezes, you will have our president (V.K. Ramamurthy) rushing to her with a bunch of flowers," sneers a rival faction member**



A senior Tamil Nadu Congressman sought to explain Moopanar's attitude. "Having been a behind-the-scenes operator, Moopanar knows very little about what he should do as the leader of the CLP in the Assembly. He cannot speak effectively and has no patience or willingness to learn," he explained.

With Jayalalitha and Moopanar both opting to stay out of the Assembly, it fell upon Ramamurthy to take on Karunanidhi. And this he did by launching one agitation after another against the DMK government and attacking Karunanidhi on the floor of the House. Even Moopanar loyalists grudgingly acknowledge Ramamurthy's contribution to bolster the party's image in Tamil Nadu. "They (Moopanar's supporters) have now realised that by staying out of the Assembly, Moopanar has lost a golden opportunity of emerging as a major political force."

Moopanar's absence from the House has also attracted much ridicule from the Treasury benches, with the

chief minister pointing out that the Congress party was rudderless in the House. Moreover, with the former PCC(I) president staying away from the Assembly, his loyalists have clashed with Ramamurthy's supporters and issued contradictory and conflicting statements. All this has strengthened the DMK's hand.

For instance, Congress MLA P V Rajendran pleaded in the House that Naga Mugan, detained under the National Security Act (NSA) for suspected secessionist tendencies, should be released from jail. Karunanidhi, taking advantage of the situation, claimed that Rajendran's request was "not one to be brushed away."

This trend continued. When Congressmen voted against the government's Bill announcing cheap liquor, Rajendran did not support them. Another Congress legislator, Peter Alphonse, praised Karunanidhi for resolving the Cauvery river water dispute. In fact, Alphonse even went to the extent of demanding at a Tirunelveli district development council meeting that Karunanidhi's portrait be placed on the walls of the council hall. Many partymen aver that Moopanar could have prevented such incidents if he had attended the Assembly sessions.

On the other hand, the Moopanar faction is quick to point out that Vazhapadi Ramamurthy has only been functioning as an "extended quarter of AIADMK influence." As soon as he was appointed the PCC(I) president, Ramamurthy, apparently, rushed to Jayalalitha's Poes Garden bungalow and presented her with a bouquet of flowers. "If she sneezes, you will have our president rushing to her with a bunch of flowers," sneered a rival faction member.

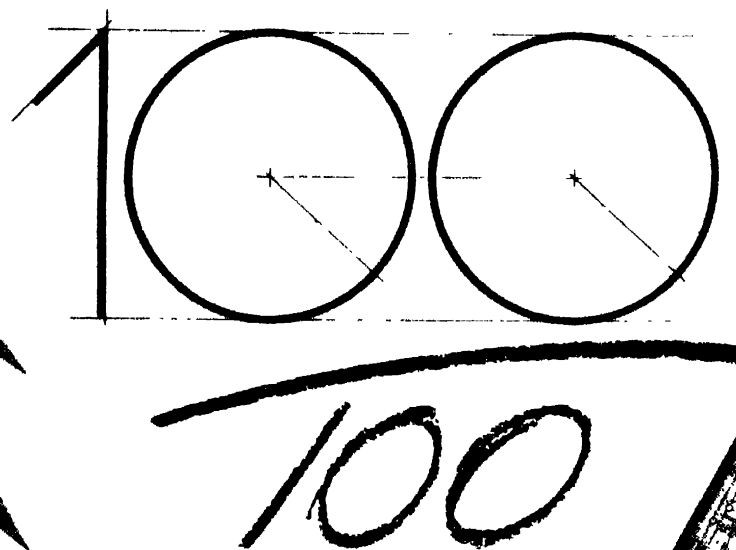


**Moopanar had hoped that Rajiv Gandhi would pull up Ramamurthy for blaming him for the party's debacle in the Assembly elections**





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# "They can't find fault with me"

*PCC(I) president V.K. Ramamurthy on the charges levelled against him*

**SUNDAY:** You must be happy now because the party president Rajiv Gandhi has made it clear during his visit that there would not be any change in the PCC leadership. But will your opponents in the party give up so easily?

**Ramamurthy:** This announcement ruling out change in the PCC(I) presidency should put a full stop to all the media statements and public speeches by these people against me. In spite of this announcement, if this state of affairs continues, then the high command will be very tough with the statement-makers.

**Q:** Ever since you assumed presidency of the PCC(I), there hasn't been any co-ordination with the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) headed by G.K. Moopanar. Hasn't this hurt party interests?

**A:** I have already reported to the high command on the state of affairs here. I am sending monthly reports on how the party has been functioning inside the state Assembly. Our leader Rajiv Gandhi used to be present at ten o'clock in the party office and give clear directions to the Congress(I) MPs on what line they should all take on specific issues coming up. It is very unfortunate that Moopanar continues to stay away from the Assembly sessions and I don't foresee him changing his attitude in the coming days either.

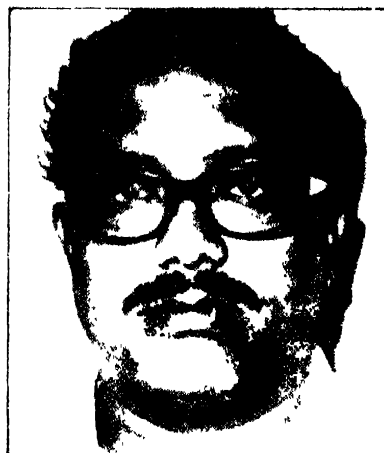
**Q:** During his recent visit to Madras, the AICC(I) general secretary H.K. L. Bhagat, who is in charge of the Tamil Nadu party affairs, seems to have tried his best to bring about peace between the squabbling PCC(I) factions. Was there much success?

**A:** Bhagat explained the party position to all and also made it clear that the high command will not tolerate dissent any longer. There cannot be these statements attacking the PCC(I) leadership. And as

for my problems with Moopanar, I must tell you here that I had always discussed all major issues with him.

**Q:** Your critics say you are more loyal to the AIADMK general secretary Ms Jayalalitha than even to your own party. Comment.

**A:** That is a very mischievous propaganda they are carrying out



against me, because they can't find fault with me easily. I want to have a clear understanding and smooth functioning of the alliance with the AIADMK, what is wrong with that? After my appointment as the PCC(I) president, I had called on Ms Jayalalitha at her residence and she presented me with a bouquet. But the newspapers next morning said I had offered her the bouquet! This kind of talk is only aimed at breaking the alliance.

**Q:** After Rajiv's visit and Bhagat's efforts to patch-up, do you feel confident that there will be no more dissent against you in the Tamil Nadu Congress?

**A:** I had some problems initially but now I am absolutely free from such pin-pricks. I have been functioning freely even earlier and now I have been further given a free hand for conducting the party affairs in Tamil Nadu.

**W**hile trading charges with the Moopanar faction, Ramamurthy has also been consolidating his base. He has reconstituted the district units and, in the process, got rid of Moopanar's men, who till recently had occupied prime posts. "I was appointed the PCC chief on 10 April, 1989, and by June the same year, I completed the reconstitution of all the district units. I literally bulldozed my way," Ramamurthy said with obvious pride. While the PCC(I) president claims that the new heads of the district units have breathed fresh life into the hitherto dormant organisation, the leaders of the other factions complain about his bullying ways.

Consequently, when Ramamurthy announced agitations against the DMK regime, there was a lukewarm response from rival factions. An angry PCC chief reacted by threatening punitive action against those partymen who did not fall in line with the PCC(I)'s directives. He accused all those who did not join the campaigns against the DMK regime of "trying to practise the politics of luxury".

Of course, the high command is not unaware of the bad blood that exists between the different factions. During his recent visit to Kanchi, Rajiv Gandhi got a glimpse of how the state unit of the Congress functions. The workers' meeting which Ramamurthy had organised for him at Kanchipuram turned into a free-for-all, with some members demanding a change in the PCC(I) leadership and others insisting that the present chief be allowed to continue. However, despite the infighting, there are those who feel that all is not lost. Their optimism stems from the fact that factionalism has always riven party units all over the country, including the AICC headquarters in Delhi, but the crises have always blown over. According to Moopanar: "A Congressman in Tamil Nadu is like the Hindu wife. She will not rush to get a divorce even if there is acute harassment from her in-laws. She will continue to remain loyal to her husband—in this case, the party president Rajiv Gandhi."

Neither Moopanar nor Ramamurthy, however, seems to have any long-term plans to check the dissent. For the moment, they appear to have taken a decision to let things be and hope that the organisational elections—whenever they are held—will resolve the power tussle in the Pradesh Congress Committee. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**



# Murder most foul

*Is the CPI(M) behind the assault of senior health officials near Calcutta?*

**A**round seven pm on 31 May, a white Maruti van carrying health department officials was speeding down the Basanti highway connecting Calcutta with the Sunderbans. As the car reached the Bantala market on the outskirts of the city, a group of young men tried to stop the car. Sensing trouble—the driver, Abani Naiya, tried to speed away with the youths hotly in pursuit. But as luck would have it, the van overturned while negotiating a bump. The miscreants pounced upon the pas-

his injuries two days later. The two others—Renu Ghosh of the UNICEF and Uma Ghosh, a senior health official—are still fighting for their lives in hospital.

There are several versions regarding the brutal assault. One theory has it that the people of the area suspected that child-lifters were fleeing in the car. In fact, such a possibility has some basis as eye-witnesses confirmed that the miscreants who were chasing the car had raised such a cry. Moreover, the area was rife with rumours that child-lifters were active in the area, which is not far from Tiljala, the headquarters of the Anandmargis. In 1982, Tiljala was the scene of a gruesome massacre of 17 Margis, who were burnt to death by a mob after they were suspected to be involved in kidnapping children. Police officials feel that the anti-socials, who had made Bantala a zone of terror, deftly utilised the prevailing tension to loot people. Drivers passing that way had also complained that miscreants often force them to stop and part with money.

Critics of this theory, however, point out that there is no basis whatsoever to the rumour that children were being kidnapped from the predominantly rural locality. There are no police records to prove that locals have lodged complaints against child-lifters. More important, granted that there was panic among the people, why didn't the police take action to allay the fears of the locals? This has led many to believe that the child-lifting rumour was deliberately floated by a group of anti-socials, who are hand-in-glove with the local cops, to launch the attack.

The incident, which took place only a couple of miles from Calcutta and in the evening, made the top brass of the city police and the politicians sit up. After all, it was the ruling Left Front government which claimed not very long back that Calcutta was the safest metropolis in the country. Moreover, the barbaric attack took place in a



locality which is a traditional stronghold of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). State health minister Prasanta Sur, who had initially remarked that there was nothing unusual about the incident—he even said that the women should not have chosen to return home through that route so late—immediately called a press conference to condemn the attack. And realising the political implications of the incident—the Calcutta civic polls are round the corner—chief minister Jyoti Basu ordered a judicial probe into the affair. “The incident is most barbaric and unprecedented and the police will do its very best to apprehend the culprits,” the CM added.

**T**hat the chief minister meant business was soon in evidence after the police sealed off the village, searched every house and made random arrests. Ironically a majority of those apprehended were CPI(M) workers and sympathisers. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is looking into the affair, arrested as many as 172 persons from Bantala. However, many police officials feel that the real culprits have escaped—but the cops have managed to identify seven or eight youths who actually dragged out the women and beat them up.



**The damaged Maruti van**

sengers—all of them women—dragged them out of the vehicle, looted their belongings and mercilessly beat up the officials in front of a huge crowd which had gathered at the spot by then.

Even the driver was not spared. He was hit on the head by a sharp weapon. Their job over, the anti-socials made a quick get away, leaving the health department officials groaning in pain in a pool of blood. The police, who were only a few hundred yards from the spot, arrived, as usual, after everything was over and shifted the injured to the city's NRS hospital. Amita Dewan, the 46-year-old media officer with the West Bengal health department, was pronounced brought dead, while driver Naiya succumbed to





(Clockwise from left) senior police officials at the site of the murder; state health officer Anita Dewan; the body of driver Abani Naiya: gruesome death

A few days after the 31 May happening, the CID claimed to have made a major breakthrough in the case. Following the statement made by Renu Ghosh, one of those injured—she told the police that she was attacked by a bearded man who looked like a *sanyasin*—the CID arrested Madan Mondal from Bantala market. He had shaved off his beard to avoid detection. "Later, Mondal, alias Tepa, confessed that he was among those who lynched the women and even sexually assaulted them," said a top CID official. The cops also came to learn that on the evening of that fateful Wednesday, Tepa and his friends were all drunk, and as soon as they saw the Maruti van approaching, they decided to loot the car.

But what must have embarrassed the ruling communists the most was the arrest of another youth, who is a close relative of the CPI(M)-led Krishak Front leader of the area. Interrogation revealed that the Krishak Front leader's son too took an active part in the attack.

Amal Majumdar, the CPI(M) councillor from the Bantala locality also believes that the Krishak Front was responsible for the inhuman attack on the women. The police have also taken into custody one Sanyasi Chakraborty, a member of the CPI(M)-led

*panchayat samity* of the adjoining Sonarpur area. "If our party members were involved, we will not intervene to have them released. Let them be punished because they have tarnished the image of the party," said Jayanta Bhattacharya, a local CPI(M) leader.

That the CPI(M) was directly involved in the heinous incident was apparent on 8 June, when CID officials decided to interrogate the powerful secretary of the CPI(M)'s Calcutta district committee, Lakshi Sen. The CID has taken this crucial decision after the revelations made by some of those arrested from Bantala. Though Sen has claimed that his party has nothing to do with the crime and blame the Congress(I) for the attack, the CID's move clearly indicates otherwise.

Embarrassed by the investigations, the CPI(M) leadership tried to wriggle out of the situation by organising street-corner meetings, where party stalwarts squarely blamed the police for failing to maintain law and order. And the women's wing of the CPI(M) took out processions at Bantala to counter the Congress(I)'s propaganda that the CPI(M) was shielding the guilty.

But the Opposition, Congress(I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are not willing to let the opportunity

go. Both the parties have stepped up their campaign against the Marxists and they are not happy despite Jyoti Basu promptly ordering a judicial probe. Former chief minister P. C. Sen felt that the judge's investigations will not yield immediate results as it is a long-drawn process. Pradesh Congress chief A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, too, thought the same and has demanded the resignation of the chief minister. "Basu's assurance is only an eye-wash. The real culprits will go scot-free," claimed Somen Mitra, one of the general secretaries of the Congress(I).

Meanwhile, the CID, in a confidential report on the incident submitted to the inspector general of police, West Bengal, has come down heavily on the local administration for failing to take action against criminals operating in the Bantala locality. It has noted that the area had become a den of anti-socials and despite repeated complaints from drivers, the police did nothing to check their activities.

But a large section of the people are sure that the barbaric incident has a distinct political tinge. And it will take a lot of effort on the part of the state's CPI(M) leadership to dispel the belief that the communists are not a party of the toughs. •

**Barun Ghosh/Calcutta**



*Date 9 June, 1989 Place the banks of the Jamuna in Delhi The occasion: the first-ever public burning of drugs seized by the police*

*A little before 5 pm, 710 kgs of hashish, 71 kgs of ganja, 60 kgs of bhang, 80 kgs of chura post and 629 mgs of heroin were brought to the riverside in a van, and dumped on a pile of logs With due ceremony, Delhi's commissioner of police Vijay Karan lit the fire and the drugs went up in smoke, to the applause of the police officers, journalists and social activists in attendance*

**S**uch ceremonies have been performed only too often since then And with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) issuing instructions that all seized drugs should be destroyed even before the cases go to court, their incidence is bound to register an even greater increase With charges of pilferage from police *maal-khanas* (godowns) and allegations that most drugs find their way back into the open market gathering strength, this does seem the most sensible course of action to adopt Though environmentalists insist that the burning of drugs in the open pollutes the atmosphere fairly seriously

According to the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (1985), illicit drugs can be confiscated by the NCB, customs collectorates, excise collectorates, the directorate of revenue intelligence, state excise departments and state police departments From 1986 onwards, the number of seizures went up considerably, with as much as 500 kgs of drugs being detected during one raid Of late, such huge hauls have become rare, but that doesn't mean that the drug inflow has dried up It's just that smugglers get smaller consignments over at a time, to reduce risk

Initially, the seized drugs became court property as soon as a case was registered and were handed over to the police only after the case was disposed of Assistant commissioner of Delhi police, V.A. Gupta says "Sometimes the case dragged on for 2-3 years. By this time there is a visible shrinkage in drugs like hashish and heroin, maybe about 20 per cent It is because of such loss of weight that charges of pilferage gain credence "

Now the NCB has laid down strict guidelines for the disposal of drugs



**Delhi police burning drugs: polluting the atmosphere ?**

# Light my fire

*The Narcotics Control Bureau decides that seized drugs are for burning*

All concerned agencies have been advised that drugs should be destroyed every month or so, preferably in furnaces Each agency has, on instructions from NCB, set up a separate committee to look into cases of drug disposal The Delhi police committee is headed by the additional commissioner of the CID and has the DCP (deputy commissioner of police), vigilance, DCP, police control room, and the sub-divisional magistrate, Punjabi Bagh for members, while the DCP, crime, is the convener These committees are expected to meet and destroy seized drugs once every two months, but not all of them have taken to the task with enthusiasm

**T**his charge cannot, however, be levelled against the Bombay police, whose DCP (narcotics) Rahul

Sur has the distinction of sending up 550 kilos of heroin and 250 kilos of hashish up in smoke on the beaches of Sewree "In India, one kilo of heroin sells for Rs 1.25 lakh, while hashish sells for Rs 4,000 per kilo," says Sur "But in the international market heroin sells for anything upto one crore in Indian rupees for a kilo." Which means that, in effect, the total worth of the narcotics burnt was a mind-boggling Rs 550 crores and 10 lakhs.

It is two months since Sur destroyed 295 kilos of drugs (mostly heroin), using kerosene to send the narcotics up in flames "It took a long time to burn," he muses, "after which we doused the ashes with sea water." By that time, however, the pall of smoke had added to atmospheric pollution, giving rise to a number of allergies and increasing the incidence of colds and





### Narcotics Control Bureau's all-India figures for drug seizures

| Years                | Heroin | Ganja  | Hashish |
|----------------------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1988                 | 3,029  | 45,994 | 17,523  |
| 1989                 | 2,714  | 54,463 | 8,179   |
| 1990<br>(till April) | 751    | 5,752  | 907     |

### All-India figures for drugs destroyed

(INCLUDING BACKLOG)

| Years                | Heroin | Ganja    | Hashish |
|----------------------|--------|----------|---------|
| 1988                 | 3,691  | 2,48,176 | 34,176  |
| 1989                 | 1,937  | 6,109    | 13,477  |
| 1990<br>(till April) | 452    | 3,394    | 1,307   |

(ALL FIGURES IN KGS)



Heroin seized: does it find its way back to the open market?

coughs

"That may have been possible," says Sur, "but you will agree that anything which the narcotics sent up in the atmosphere couldn't have been a darn sight worse than what we are already breathing in the city. That's why we pay so much attention to the wind factor. It's important that the smoke take itself to the sea."

"Also the seized narcotics cannot lie in the strongroom at various police stations forever. For, one thing they give out a peculiar smell. For another, the public then insists that what we have seized is coming back into the market because of pilferage. Therefore the decision to burn. But even that is criticised. With us, it's a case of damned if you do and damned if you don't."

**B**ut surely the simplest thing to do would be to get an incinerator to do away with the drugs. Apparently not. There is a plethora of agencies who have to be consulted, and though they all agree that there should be a "scientific" method of disposal, each insists on a different process. Says a senior police official: "The situation would be funny if it wasn't so bizarre. Instead of such like-minded agencies working together so as to pool their intelli-

gence, each jealously guards its own information, thus leading to a duplication of work."

In such an atmosphere, the idea of a common incinerator, which all the agencies will use, causes more problems than it solves. Says a Bombay police official: "Each wants to know whether the other will pay for the disposal device as also for its maintenance." As of now the proposal for an incinerator (which costs around Rs 35 lakhs) is resting with the Maharashtra government. And until it is cleared, drugs will continue to be burnt in whatever way the disposal agencies see fit. For instance, the directorate of

**The simplest way to do away with drugs would be to get an incinerator. But, a plethora of agencies has to be consulted, and each has its own ideas about 'scientific' methods of disposal**

revenue intelligence—which earlier tried the Bharat Petroleum incinerator and found the process "too time-consuming"—might once again opt for the high temperature (above 7000°C) industrial furnace in a Thane glass factory. But whatever the method adopted, one thing is clear. The seized drugs must be destroyed as soon as possible (except in those cases where they might have medicinal value).

Before that, however, the police (and other agencies) must step up surveillance. This seems a little difficult because of the lack of adequate personnel, but then such officers as DCP Sur have already begun recruiting additional people (including women) and setting up a network of informers. "This will take some time," he admits, "but will be tremendously beneficial towards our working."

What will help in this connection is the reward offered to informants. Rs 20,000 per kilo of heroin seized at 99 per cent purity, the amount decreasing proportionately with the purity of the product. And the cheques given to the informants, after all the formalities are done, will be blank ones. Blank where the recipient's name is, that is. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi and Pinkie Virani/Bombay**



# The national garment

*V.P. Singh's latest idea is an attempt to clothe his political nakedness*



A bouquet of flowers, at least, my friends, if not perhaps a Bharat Ratna, to our respected Tauji for Choiceest Abuse of the Year. With that graphic imagery, penetrating precision and

keen wit which characterises a Haryanavi in high dudgeon, the Tau, on behalf of us all, has wreaked vengeance on the *chandal chowkdi* who have been regaling us with their brand of abuse ever since V.P. Singh was caught out hiring an American con-man to pursue his personal political ambitions. Are there among my readers any who have not recognised what and who our *upa pradhan mantri* is talking of? For their benefit, then, a word of explanation.

Many of the newspapers that Mulayam Singh Yadav does not, on principle, read (but which his English public school-educated son apparently does) have translated *chandal chowkdi* into English as the 'Gang of Four'. Now that, alas, is not only inaccurate but also misleading. For 'Gang of Four' is a Chinese *gaali*. And the Tau did not have to go all the way to China to import a foreign expletive when his very own home state is the country's leader in indigenising the technology of abuse. No, no, *chandal chowkdi* is as *ash* as *desi ghee*. And the language of Shakespeare lacks the brown earthiness of Haryanavi Hindi to render the full flavour of the original. Could it be translated as the 'Witches' Foursome'? Or, perhaps, as the 'Satanic Four'? Or, possibly, the 'Devil's Quartet'? You get the general idea. The trick is to recognise that the technology does not require the input of mothers, sisters and other female relatives to emerge rich, expressive and fit for family consumption.

The Witches' Foursome who have earned the Tau's ire are, of course, the *shaitans* of the Express Building: one, the aspiring Mahatma, Arun Shourie (who falls just a whisker short of his goal because his heart is as full of venom as Gandhi's was full of love), second, Prabhakar Joshi (Shourie's counterpart in Hindi and saffron), third, S. Gurumurthy (the accountant in khaki knickers), and fourth, who else but that land-seam artiste and tax-dodge genius, Seth Ramnath Goenka himself?

They've got the Tau's goat because they put about a story—which absolutely no one else did—of a conspiracy to topple V.P. Singh and drop the 'Front' from his National Front (NF) government. Everyone named as a conspirator in ridding our present government of both its Front and its frontman—from Harkishan Singh Surjeet of the CPI(M) to Chandra Shekhar—denounced the story as an outrageous invention, a figment of the collective imagination of the Satanic Four. Who, then, were the plotters and what was the plot?

The search for an answer to that question takes us to the tell-tale point at which the story would have quietly atrophied into a one-day wonder—but for our besieged Prime Minister himself, no less. For, returning from his long week-end in Malaysia (in the same Jumbo jet, incidentally, that the *chandal chowkdi* had so vigorously derided when Rajiv Gandhi flew in it, but are now strangely silent ever since VP tanked up their reporters brimfull of the right stuff aboard Air India's Emperor Whatever-it-is), the Prime Minister gratuitously announced that he, for one, would be delighted to have a national government. Everyone—starting with his own squabbling party, extending to NTR, the chairman of the National Front, and the Tauji, of course ("a foolish idea") and going on to the CPI(M) ("unreal";

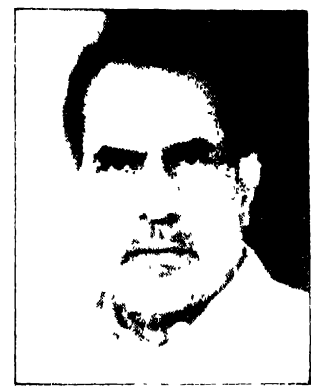
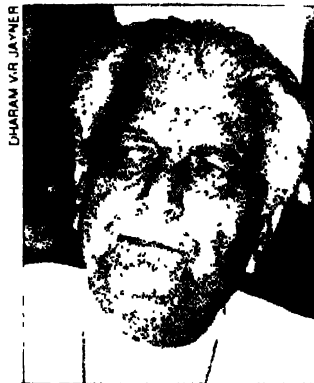


RAJESH KUMAR

EMS) the Congress—has ridiculed the notion. Everyone, that is, except the BJP. And therein lies the truth of the tale. For, we are caught up in a theatre of the absurd.

Except in a grave emergency, the very idea of a national government is a nonsensical non-starter in a democracy. The natural mode of a democracy is not consensus but confrontation. It is the dialectic of debate that furnishes the dynamics of democracy. It is out of clash and contention and the raucous interplay of ideas and ideology, of principles and positions that emerge the processes of growth and maturing, of progress and prosperity. It is only in the severest crisis that a democracy contemplates a national government. The United States has never had a national government. Britain rejected it at the start of the First World War, reluctantly agreeing to a Liberal-Conservative coalition only after the fighting got bogged down in the muddy trenches of the poppy fields of





**V.P. Singh**, fresh from his outing abroad, proposes to an unsuspecting nation the formation of a national government, in effect telling his countrymen "I have nothing to offer you but blood(y **Devi Lal**), toil(ing **Ajit Singh**), tears(ome **Maneka**) and sweat(y **Chandra Shekhar**)!"

Flanders. Only once ever has there been a national government in England—and that was as Hitler's armies poised themselves in France to commence the Battle of Britain. On 10 May, 1940, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigned, saying the need of the hour was "new and drastic action" to carry on the war "with the energy and vigour essential to victory."

"What is needed is the formation of a government which will include members of the Liberal and Labour Oppositions and thus present a united front to the enemy."

Winston Churchill took over as Prime Minister of the national government, telling his countrymen and women, "I have nothing to offer you but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

And here, V P. Singh, fresh from a pleasant outing abroad, proposes to an unsuspecting nation the formation of a national government, in effect telling his countrymen and women: "I have nothing to offer you but blood(y

Devi Lal), toil(ing Ajit Singh), tears (ome Maneka) and sweat(y Chandra Shekhar)!"

There is no emergency facing the nation. But there is an emergency facing V.P. Singh. His dreams are crumbling around him.

**C**hautala, reincarnated at Darba Kalan, has returned like Banquo's ghost to haunt our homegrown Lord (and Lady) Macbeth. "Out, out damned spot!" The Tau is on the warpath, declaring with rustic openness that while the NF government must survive, V P Singh is as dispensable as a paper napkin. Petitions are circulated, with over a third of the Janata Dal's Lok Sabha members signing, denouncing the home minister for his many and varied lapses.

Most disturbing of all, from V.P. Singh's point of view, is that his search for scandal is running out of steam. For, it is on scandal that he has built his political fortunes. And now, knock

the can around as best as he might, it is just refusing to yield up any more worms. Bhure Lal's Dial-an-FIR service is merely getting tiresome. Arun Jaitley and Mahadevan, armed with their letters rogatory, keep returning to Sweden as if they were porno stars—but their impotence over Bofors is getting awfully embarrassing.

For three years, not a day passed without V P. Singh accusing Rajiv Gandhi of not getting the "secret" portion of the Swedish National Audit Bureau (SNAB) report—because, he repeated *ad nauseum*, it would rip the lid off the former Prime Minister's personal involvement. Now, it is V P. Singh who is keeping the lid on the SNAB "secrets"—because he knows (as you know and I know) that the ugly truth hidden in the SNAB "secrets" is that Rajiv Gandhi is in no way involved (although, for all I know, VP's comrades might well be). Else, do you think this unscrupulous lot of leakers—who have no compunction



about selective self-serving quotations from 'top secret' documents—would balk for an instant at revealing what the SNAB report contains, or, better still, planting whatever is damaging on their chattels of the press? What an irony! In Parliament last year, it was those who are now on the Treasury benches who were baying for secret reports, whatever the national reasons for non-disclosure. And this year, it is those same bayers who have suddenly gone all coy and become so possessive of their so-called "secrets."

him. If he is to avoid what promises to be the briefest prime ministership in Indian history (barring Gulzari Lal Nanda's two holding operations), the choice before him is to either find a credible scandal to keep him in power a while longer—or yield his seat to another. Of course, the worst-kept secret in the country is that the Prime Minister well knows that there is no scandal on which he can get his predecessor—because the '10 per cent Raj' was always a media myth. True, there is no smoke without a fire, but,

someone, somewhere is going to be annoyed. A stable government can take decisions because the dissatisfied can be contained in the Opposition. A weak government is weak only because the choices it makes bring dissatisfaction into its own ranks. That is now happening to V P Singh. Non-policy and inaction are no longer viable options.

The way out is to make everyone else responsible for policy and decisions—so that the blame attaches to them for all that goes wrong while the teflon Prime Minister continues to reign, if not rule. This is the true meaning of "national consensus" which V P Singh has advanced as the rationale for a national government.

The bulk of the Janata Dal backbenchers want to rule—because only the Raja can reign. As their impatience grows, the other NF pretenders to the Raja's *gaddi* are getting restive. The BJP knows that it can find no better *tattoo* than V P Singh to hold the fort while they themselves get ready for their Great Leap Forward to South Block. For, neither Devi Lal nor Chandra Shekhar would kowtow to the BJP quite as deferentially as V P. Singh does. Hence their support to his plea for a national government.

If this makes the Tau fret, let me add one more cautionary tale from my little store of *videshi* lore with which this column seeks from time to time to comfort our National Tau. There once was a Raja in a very distant land who wanted to wear the finest clothes in the world. A terrified tailor was ordered to make them on pain of having his head chopped off if he didn't produce the very best. The poor man made nothing at all but pretended to drape the Raja in the most magnificent vestments. All the nobles applauded. All the courtiers cheered. Naked as Mother Nature, the Raja persuaded himself that he was dressed in the most resplendent finery. Until a little child cried out: "Look, Mummy, the Raja has no clothes."

The moment has now come to reveal the truth, what our Raja Saheb needs is not a national government but a 'national garment'—in which to clothe his political nakedness. And the uniform required was prescribed years ago by the immortal Raj Kapoor:

*Mera joota hai Marxwadi  
Mera kachcha RSS ka  
Sar pe kaali topi naqli  
Phur bhi dil hai asli khokla •*

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position.

### The Express camp earned the Tau's ire



Ramnath Goenka



Arun Shourie



S. Gurumurthy

The A320s are grounded, costing the country a fortune that makes the Bofors pay-offs sound like small change—and all because of a malicious and totally motivated attempt to pin a clear case of pilot error on a man who had the genius to spot a bargain when it came the country's way. The A320s are the hottest selling aircraft in the business today for the first time in decades. Boeing has been outstripped in aviation technology and is even in danger of being overtaken by McDonnell Douglas, which has taken a lead in replicating Airbus Industrie's fly-by-wire technology. While the whole world queues up to buy A320s (and queue-jumpers are ready to pay hefty premiums to get ahead in the line), our scandal-hungry government is not only dismantling the tremendous lead we secured five years ago, but is also in danger of being mulcted of millions for breach of contract, our country is in danger of having to fork out hundreds of extra crores for the Boeing substitute which guzzles two-and-a-half times more fuel, and tourism and travel are in the doldrums because Airt cannot find aircraft to take on lease in a market where sellers are rare and buyers (most much better-heeled than us) are many.

VP Singh is desperate because he knows that time is running out for

then, fanning the smoke only puts out the fire. So, VP knows—even if no one else knows for sure—that he is not going to succeed on the scandal front before his own enemies within catch up with him. So, what does he do to keep everyone happy?

**H**is first hundred days' strategy was to blame everything on the previous government and avoid having a policy on anything—so that the problems of governance would not stand in the way of survival for a hundred days, in a way, it worked—because the previous regime's derelictions were still a fresh memory and the euphoria within the NF over large new houses, acres of lawn, security guards and bullet-proof cars kept everyone happy. I had warned then that "the honeymoon is over. Ahead lies a hundred days of stern reckoning."

In the last hundred days that stern reckoning has now come to pass. The lack of policy has recoiled on the Master of Inaction in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Tamil Nadu and imminently, over Ram Janmabhoomi in the Gangetic plains. Decisions are becoming imperative, drift can no longer be a substitute for policy. All decisions and all policies involve choice. Whatever the decision one takes, whatever the policy one adopts,





# The great masala movie novel

*Allan Sealy's Hero doesn't qualify for that title*

**T**he Trotter-nama, as both Eugene Trotter, artist, and I Allan Sealy, novelist, probably know, is a hard, if not impossible, act to follow. The Kirani School of miniature painting, of which the artist is a superb exemplar, depends for its power on cumulative effect—it takes a century of miniatures, and thus ironically, a work of the scale of *The Trotter-nama*, for us to recognise the scope of the artist's/novelist's inventive capacities. Perhaps it is a measure of the artist's exhaustion that when Eugene Trotter appears again in Sealy's second novel *Hero: A Fable*, he is a much reduced figure, good for painting only a "streaming filmi-garish" portrait of Prime Minister Hero and his heroine-wife, U.D. Cologne. *The Trotter-nama*, as a chronicle, works its magic spell by piling on detail and digression, thereby generating a fertile and extensive history. *Hero*, as a fable, is much less ambitious in focus and invention. Its plot, narrative technique, and rhetorical effects derive primarily from the less-than-subtle logic of the Bombay masala movie.

"Now, it has never been decreed that every Bombay movie shall have a Song, a Dance, a Fight, a Cabaret, a Rape, a Chase, a Rescue and so forth, but there are some laws—the law of profitable returns for instance—which every producer and director imbibes with his mother's milk... The adult formula to which he graduates is his masala... So my chapters are preordained, the masala beyond my control," writes the narrator of *Hero*. Thus, this screenplay has all the sequences listed above, as also an Entr-

ance, an Intermission and an Exit, and a Flashback, a Joke, a Kiss, Dialogue, Penance, a Party, and Cliffhangers I and II. As this inventory of vignettes suggests, a comic novelist, and Sealy certainly is one, might do wonders with the filmi-form. Indeed, Sealy's attempt makes us wonder why the Great Masala Movie Novel has not been written yet. Unfortunately, *Hero* is not that novel.

Sealy is witty in his use of the formulaic and the repetitive, and has an unembarrassed ear for the bad pun. His villain, Nero (because the hero is Hero and the script-writer, Zero) is born Anirodh because his father had not heard of the condom and fathered him out of wedlock. When Sealy writes of the spread of television in the country, and of the government's moulding of public opinion via the medium, DD (once, "in the Indian Heirlines days", called Doordarshan) becomes Didi, Big Sister. The power behind the political throne of Delhi is called Gangajal Trivedi, GJ—"in shape and colour he did rather resemble a syrupy gulab jamun"—and his "rich, ripe" signature belches sing out "bribe!" and "gra-aft!" Sealy's grasp of the Bombay film idiom is also impeccable: his cabaret-dancing vamp is called Flora Fountain, and the camera closes in on a glittering crucifix in her cleavage to assure "the pious sated audience that this fair but fallen woman is only a Christian." In a fight between the hero and the villain, their hair remains unmussed even as Sealy's soundtrack confirms the intensity of the choreographed violence. "Dish!", "Dhuk!", "Dhar!", "Phataak!" and "Thaang!" goes the battle.

**T**he first half of *Hero* pays homage to Bollywood and its remarkable dream factories. In the second half, the action shifts to Delhi, as Hero transforms himself from a charismatic star into a padayatri, politician and Prime Minister. Sealy's filmic idiom allows him to work up a hilarious spoof of the goings-on at lavish parties

in New Delhi's farmhouse belt, and to include, under the rubric of the Rescue sequence, a moving Utopian vision of an egalitarian India. "And as peace broke out on the subcontinent it was found that there was money for schools in every village, for rural fair-price shops for cooperatives and tubewells and canals and vegetable gardens...widows sang love songs, beggars rode horses, telephones worked, television didn't, the rivers were pure, the streets smooth, the air as smooth as a kiss." However, the last sequences in the novel, as a thinly veiled satire of the political paranoia that resulted in Indira Gandhi's declaration of the Emergency, are not successful, as Sealy's penchant for the bizarre and the sensational moves his narrative further and further away from a genuine engagement with the grotesque horrors of that period.

Sealy's intelligence and range of interests are everywhere evident in the novel, and they endow Zero's narrative with an allusive breadth (Lacanian film theory, astrophysics, meditations upon language and culture) that occasionally runs counter to the grain of the masala screenplay. As *The Trotter-nama* made his readers aware, Sealy has many riches to offer, and perhaps it is best to leave him with the last word, if only to suggest the kind of novel *Hero* might have been: "The task is surely to make a cinema that fits the facts—the stubborn Indian facts—without throwing out fantasy. To discover forms that belong here. The glitter, the clamour, are part of an Indian style. The style exists, not just in the movies, the forms want finding. Or we're stuck with formulas. Masala. Or else foreign imitations, high-brow or low. Dover chalk for the ash cheese. The forms are there. History, literature, the folk arts, dance, theatre—they make good raiding. (So does cinema.) They're all there, waiting." ●

**Suvir Kaul**

*Hero: A Fable* by I. Allan Sealy. Published by Viking. Price: Rs 125.





B.R. Chopra



Sanjay Khan

# Court intrigues

*Sanjay Khan and B.R. Chopra are embroiled in a legal battle over the rights to The Sword Of Tipu Sultan*

**T**he eighteenth century ruler of Mysore, Tipu Sultan, would have smirked with satisfaction had he been around today. The near-theatrical feud over the tele-serial *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* would have appealed to his sense of the dramatic. And now that *Tipu* has finally gone on the tube, B.R. Chopra, of *Mahabharat* fame, and producer-actor Sanjay Khan are locked in a no-win situation. Chopra has filed a case against Khan which both camps feel will run in court for ten years or more. Both men are, however, determined to fight to the finish, much as Tipu had done centuries ago. As the Sultan lay critically wounded on the battlefield, his right-hand man Raza Khan begged him to reveal his identity to the British so that his life would be spared. Tipu ordered him to hold his tongue and continued to fight. He was shot dead, that day at Srirangapatnam in 1799.

Now, 191 years after his demise, the serial on his life had become the subject of a court battle.

Much before B.R. Chopra arrived on the scene Sanjay Khan had signed on Bhagwan Gidwani, the author of the book on Tipu (now living in Montreal). This was about ten years ago. But various other commitments and financial pressures held Khan back, and *Tipu* remained a pipe-dream.

***The Sword Of Tipu Sultan : contentious issue***



Bhagwan, impatient to see his creation transferred to celluloid approached Dr Rahi Masoom Raza, eminent script writer (of *Mahabharat* fame). Dr Raza, who has considerable clout, approached the Writers Association and squashed the agreement between Gidwani and Khan in 1984. Gidwani, now at a loose end, egged Dr Raza on to talk to his friend B.R. Chopra about making a tele-serial on his novel. He had already talked to Doordarshan, but Mandi House said that it would only be interested if B.R. Chopra agreed to direct and produce.

Sensing the raw potentiality of the subject, Chopra quietly began work on the serial after signing an agreement with Gidwani. "We had started the initial ground work on *Tipu Sultan*," says Chopra. "But after about two years, Sanjay Khan contacted me and told me that the Congress(I) wanted him to do it. Suddenly there was immense government pressure from New Delhi on me."

It was obvious that Sanjay Khan was not going to let go of his dream without a fight. Around that time, B.R. Chopra was busy with *Mahabharat* so he backed out in favour of Sanjay Khan. "I did it to help a friend," says Chopra, "and now I find myself in court. It all began with a verbal assurance based on trust, but unfortunately now things have gone bad."

Sanjay Khan initially asked Dr Raza to write the screen play. But once Chopra backed out, Khan changed his mind and dropped Dr Raza. The initial dialogues and script were, however, with B.R. Chopra, and Sanjay Khan's camp holds that he was to pay for them. Khan's lawyer, Berjis Desai says, "The defence of Mr Khan is that



a payment of Rs 11 lakhs was to be made for the dialogues and the script. Chopra failed to hand over the material, and Khan did not pay." Chopra's view of the agreement was slightly different and on 19 May, 1990, he took the matter to court asking that the money due to him in lieu of having foregone the opportunity of making the serial, be paid to him.

Meanwhile Gidwani, from Montreal, despatched a letter of release which stated that he would now receive the money owed to him by Sanjay Khan.

**B**ack home in Bombay B R Chopra claims to be mystified as to what went wrong with his relationship with the *Tipu* producer "We were good friends," he claims "When he got burnt, I was in Bangalore. I immediately went to the hospital to be with his family. We have been family friends for so many years, and now there is all this bitterness. *Tipu Sultan* was registered with Door-darshan in my name. Gidwani and me were going to do it. Sanjay wanted me to part with it, and I did so for a friend. The first telecast of *Tipu Sultan* was going to be aired on 19 May, so I sent as many as five hand-delivered notes to him asking him to pay me. He wrote back on 14 May refusing to do so. I did not want to go through an endless correspondence, so I took the matter to court."

The Chopra camp claims that Khan and Co. haven't done justice to the serial. Dr Raza, who was unceremoniously dropped by Sanjay Khan says, "His serial is revolving around a particular character. Our's would have revolved around a period. Unless you understand the period you cannot understand the man."

Chopra now feels that he should have never granted a favour to Sanjay Khan as he has lost a great chance to follow up with an even more grandiose serial after *Mahabharat* "What a great story," he says with admiration. "It is terrific material. His serial was going to be aired late in the month of May, just when my *Mahabharat* was coming to an end. I could have done it myself since I now have the time."

But Chopra may have the last word

## Cut and thrust

*Tipu has always remained in the news—but for the wrong reasons*

**T**he *Sword Of Tipu Sultan* is jinxed. From its inception the serial has been dogged by problems. A raging fire on the sets in Mysore on 8 February, 1990, burnt 26 people to death and Sanjay Khan himself was critically injured. Then, the telecast of *Tipu*, scheduled for 10 February, 1990, was put off amidst a controversy about its historical authenticity. Around this time, two leading ad agencies initiated litigation against producer Sanjay Khan, claiming



**A scene from *Tipu Sultan* : would Chopra have done it differently?**

that they were being done out of exclusive rights to the advertising slots before the serial, involving a sum of Rs 2 crores

More trouble was on the way. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bombay Malayalee Samaj and the Shiv Sena threatened a nationwide agitation against Sanjay

Khan's depiction of Tipu Sultan as a secularist. The Mysore king, they maintained, has been a religious bigot.

Some time after the fire, Khan was accused of staging the catastrophe to save himself from bankruptcy. There were some who openly accused him of trying to save himself, while leaving his crew members to their fate.

In Kerala, an agitation began and gathered strength even as Sanjay Khan was fighting for his life at Bombay's Jaslok hospital. The argument went that Tipu Sultan had invaded Malabar, laid waste to the land, desecrated temples and converted many Hindus at the point of his famous sword. And that it was foolish to glorify him on celluloid.

As this controversy snowballed B.R. Chopra entered the fray, claiming that he had the rights to Bhagwan Gidwani's novel. And that Khan had omitted to give him his dues. At present the court has directed Sanjay Khan to deposit a sum of Rs 76,250 in court. He also has to deposit Rs 27,500 every Friday, a day before the telecast of each episode. The order comes up for hearing on 7 June.

Till the question is resolved, the money will be deposited in a bank account, and paid to whoever wins the case.

Sanjay Khan and B R Chopra, once close friends, now stand on either side of Tipu's sword. It remains to be seen who comes off worse.

yet, with viewers maintaining that *Tipu* is not a patch on *Mahabharat*. Abbas Khan, a stage actor in Bombay, who avidly watches both serials says, "I wish B R. Chopra could have done *Tipu*. I am sure that had he done it, the canvas of this tele-serial would have been larger. The B R magic is missing."

Khan has his defenders, though. Sushila Deshpande, an aspiring actress points out, "After *Mahabharat* everything else will seem small. There is nothing wrong with *Tipu Sultan*. It is just that people see it, and instantly

compare it to the recently-concluded *Mahabharat*. In a couple of weeks the *Mahabharat* hangover will have gone and then I am sure that people will change their opinions."

At present, however, the court case has captured the public imagination much more than the serial itself. And with both Chopra and Khan prepared to see this to the end, *Tipu* is bound to remain in the news for some time to come. Though, not for quite the right reason. •

**Godfrey Pereira/ Bombay**







# To begin at the beginning

*Khushwant Singh's account of the month of January, as illustrated by Suddhasattwa Basu*

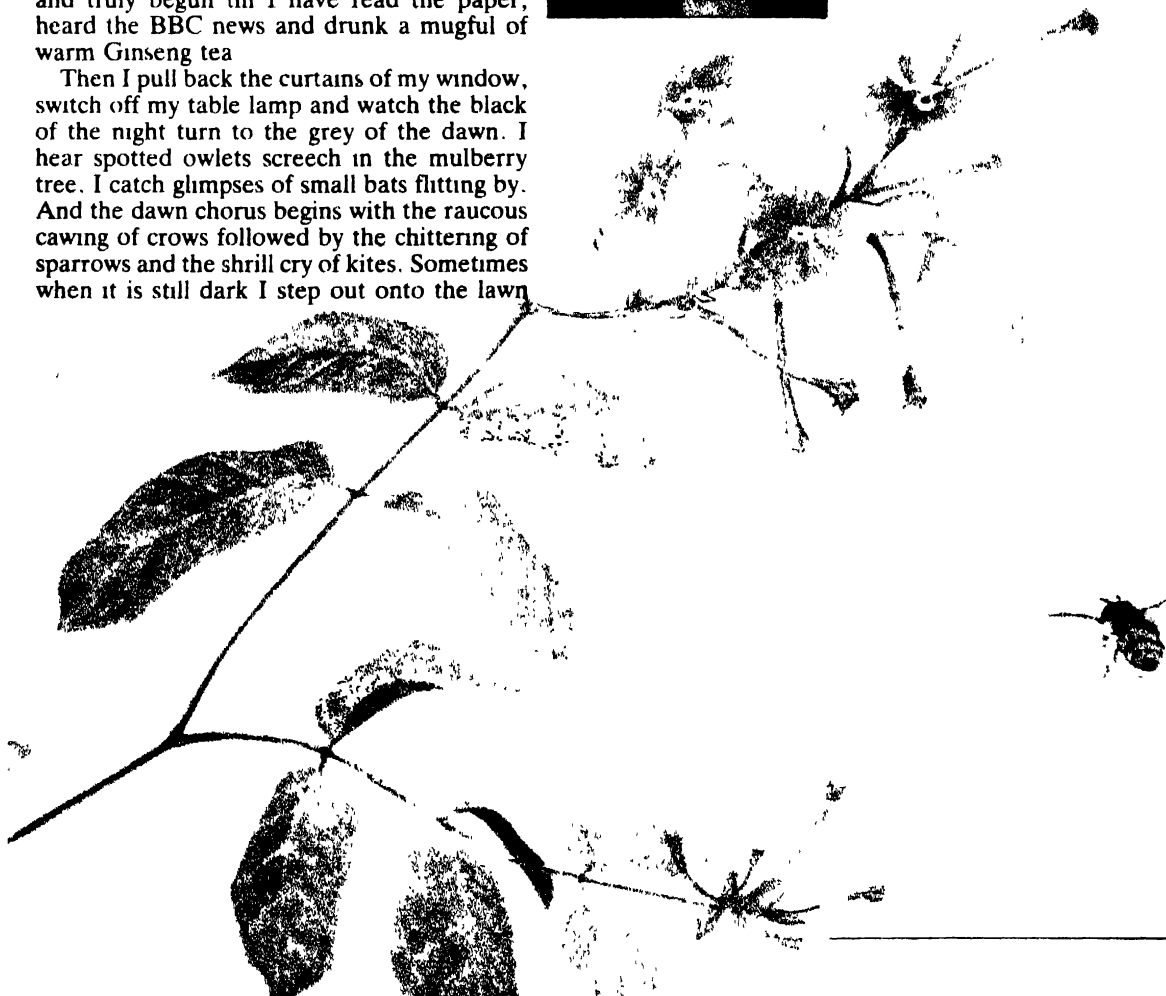
**F**or some people the year begins at the hour of midnight. They bid farewell to the old and usher in the new with revelry and song, bursting balloons and swilling champagne. For others it begins when the rim of the sun appears on the eastern horizon. For me it starts some time between the two, when I get up to place a platter of milk for a dozen stray cats waiting impatiently outside my door beside the morning paper which is delivered to me at 4.30 a.m. I do not feel the day has really and truly begun till I have read the paper, heard the BBC news and drunk a mugful of warm Ginseng tea.

Then I pull back the curtains of my window, switch off my table lamp and watch the black of the night turn to the grey of the dawn. I hear spotted owlets screech in the mulberry tree. I catch glimpses of small bats flitting by. And the dawn chorus begins with the raucous cawing of crows followed by the chattering of sparrows and the shrill cry of kites. Sometimes when it is still dark I step out onto the lawn



behind my apartment to gaze at the moon or the brightly shining morning star.

I return to my study and switch on the radio to listen to the relay of the morning service (*Asa di vaar*) from the Golden Temple. When it comes to Guru Nanak's lines on the *semul* to emphasize that the size of a tree has no bearing on what it yields, I know the morning service is half over and it is time for me to wake up my wife who likes to take her morn-





ing walk in the Lodi Gardens at dawn. I get into my shorts to leave for my morning game of tennis. I have to first wipe the dew off the window panes of my car because often the humidity is above 95 per cent. It is still dark. I switch on my headlights scattering clusters of crows pecking at mangled remains of rats, cats and dogs run over by speeding traffic the night before.

My early morning drive to the Gymkhana Club and the hour and a half I spend there provide a feast for the eyes and ears. The Club grounds are full of tall trees. Since the side dividing the Gymkhana from the residence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has for security reasons been closed to traffic, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of birds in the area. My morning game of tennis is played to the accompaniment provided by magpie robins (*dayal* or *shama*), golden orioles, barbets, *koels*, peafowl and *papeehas*. The bird orchestra varies with the seasons. Often when I look up to take a lob I miss it because grey hornbills, lapwings or monsoon birds distract me.

On New Year's day the sun comes up at 7.14 a.m. It can be very cold with temperatures falling below 5°, it rarely rises above 18° centigrade on sunny afternoons. The cold takes its toll of the undernourished and unhoused poor of the country. Papers carry reports of people dying of exposure: the average toll is between 50 to 100 every winter. Morning mists—more in the category of smogs—which begin around Christmas persist till the middle of January and disrupt many airline schedules.

There is something odd about the length of days and nights. The winter solstice is on 22-23 December with the shortest day and the longest night. Thereafter days should get longer at the expense of nights, with the sun rising a little earlier and setting a little later. But it would seem that it does not happen that way. On New Year's day the sun rises at 7.14 a.m. On the following day, instead of rising earlier, it can be later by a minute a day. By Republic Day (26th January) while it rises only three minutes earlier in the mornings, it sets as many as 20 minutes later (5.55 p.m.). Apparently this eccentricity is due to the elliptical shape of the earth. Or perhaps it wobbles as it pirouettes around the solar deity.

The festival of *Lohri* in mid-January marks the peak of winter. It is celebrated by lighting bonfires. Parties of children go from door to door, chanting doggerel verses with each line ending in '*Ho, ho!*', and collecting money—it is India's version of Guy Fawkes' day. By the end of the month our brief spell of cold and the winter monsoon are on the way out. It is not unusual to have a shower or two on Republic Day (January 26) but I have rarely known the spectacular 'Beating of the Retreat' which follows two or three days later to be washed out by rain. Traditionally the win-



*Bougainvillea*

ter season ends with the advent of *Basant* (Spring) which also usually falls in the second fortnight of January or early February. As the saying goes:

*Aayaa Basant, Paalaa Urant.*

(The spring is here; the cold is nowhere)

For the rich and the well-to-do who can afford to cover themselves against the cold and keep their homes warm, January is the best of months in Delhi: blue skies and sparkling sunshine. You can bask in the sun all day long. In the evenings, while the poor shiver under the culverts and flyovers, I sip my Scotch before a blazing log fire, then snuggle into a warm bed with a hot water bottle at my feet.

Bharatirhari describes the passage of days and years in ecstatic poetry:

The cycle recurrence of sunset and dawn  
Daily serves to measure life's decay,  
But burdened in his mundane tasks,  
Man does not grasp time's fugitive flight  
Seeing old age, pain and death,  
He is not aroused to anxiety  
Drunk on delicious heady wine,  
The world is made in oblivion.

If you are looking for colour in January, go out into the countryside. The mustard is in bloom, spread out like a sea of canary-gold. Its bitter-sweet odour attracts honey bees. Besides mustard, there are lentils, mainly *arhar*, sugarcane with its pampas plumes of pale russet, and young wheat. Skylarks rise from the green fields, then plummet like stones and disappear in the verdure. By contrast, Delhi's parks and gardens are largely flowerless till the latter part of the month except for mangolds, poinsettias, chrysanthemums and bougainvilleas. Delhi's Christmas tree is the poinsettia which persists through January; it is, as its Latin suffix indicates, truly *pulcherrima* (beautiful) with its bright red leafy flowers.

Golden shower (*Bignonia venusta*) creepers begin to appear hesitantly by the last week of the month. So do pinks, phlox and nasturtiums.

While winter's cold freezes the ardour of bird and beast alike, the larger variety of some species like vultures and kites are roused by it. By mid-January pairs of kites and vultures can be seen mating on branches of leafless *semul* (silk cotton) trees and can be heard emitting excruciating screams of pain and pleasure. Big trees like the *semul* and the *maharukh* (*Ailanthus*) are preferred by these birds both for copulation and nest-building.

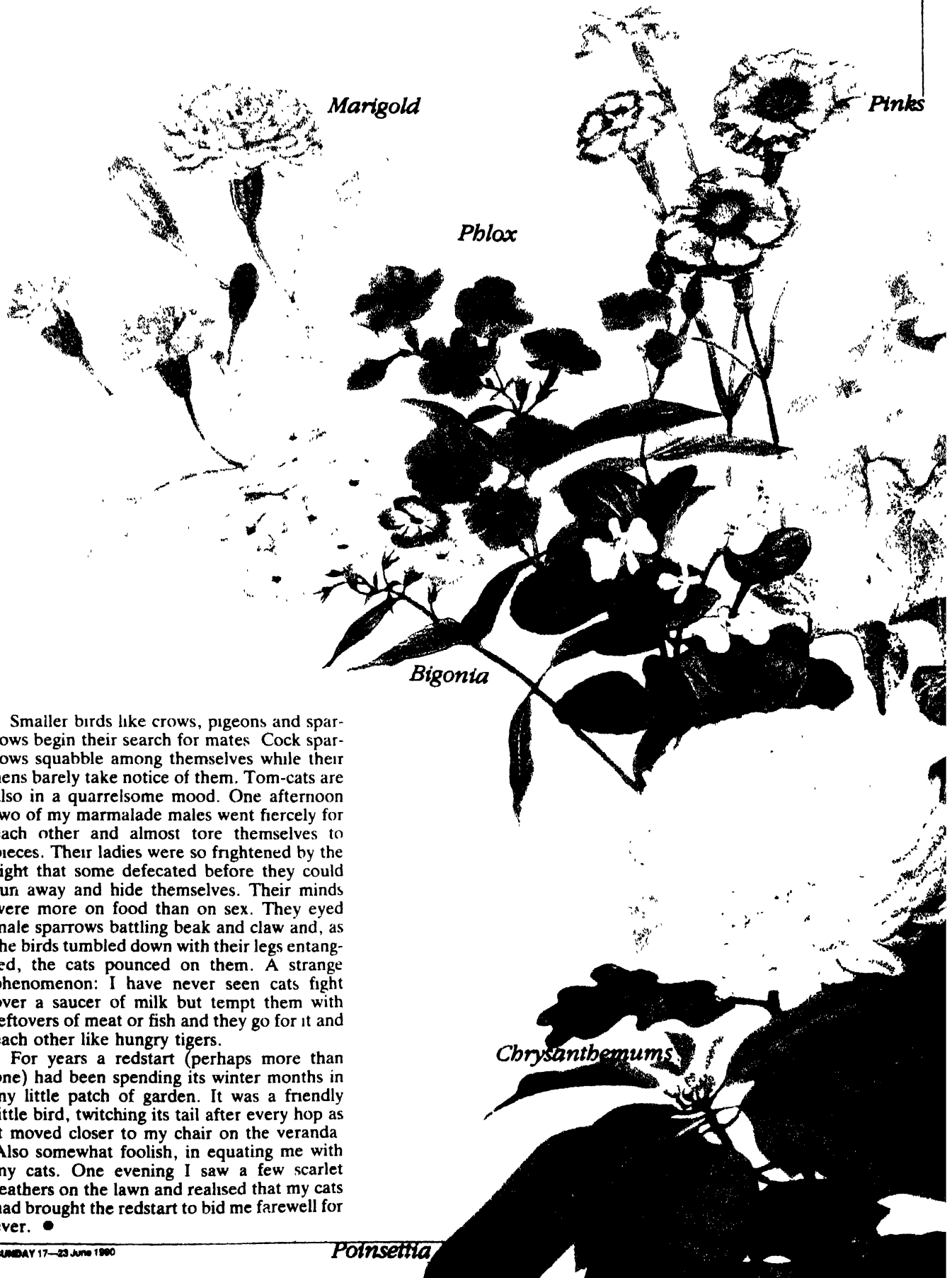


*Nasturtiums*



Nature Watch. Text by Khushwant Singh. Illustrations by Siddhasatwa Basu. Published by Lustre Press Private Limited, 1990.





Smaller birds like crows, pigeons and sparrows begin their search for mates. Cock sparrows squabble among themselves while their hens barely take notice of them. Tom-cats are also in a quarrelsome mood. One afternoon two of my marmalade males went fiercely for each other and almost tore themselves to pieces. Their ladies were so frightened by the sight that some defecated before they could run away and hide themselves. Their minds were more on food than on sex. They eyed male sparrows battling beak and claw and, as the birds tumbled down with their legs entangled, the cats pounced on them. A strange phenomenon: I have never seen cats fight over a saucer of milk but tempt them with leftovers of meat or fish and they go for it and each other like hungry tigers.

For years a redstart (perhaps more than one) had been spending its winter months in my little patch of garden. It was a friendly little bird, twitching its tail after every hop as it moved closer to my chair on the veranda. Also somewhat foolish, in equating me with my cats. One evening I saw a few scarlet feathers on the lawn and realised that my cats had brought the redstart to bid me farewell for ever. ●



**O**ur desi filmmakers deserve praise for their ingenuity. The successful English film *Eye Witness* which inspired our own eminently forgettable Neelam-Govinda starrer *Harya* is to be copied all over again. This version, called *Masoom Gawaah*, is being produced and directed by M.M. Baig, who also happens to be star child artiste Guddu's father. So naturally, the film revolves around Guddu.

But, not satisfied with making his little one act, the star papa has even made her croon a song for the film under Kalyanji Anandji's baton. And Baby Guddu warbles with such professional singers as Sadhana Sargam, Sonali Bajpayee, Kumar Shanu, Sudesh Bhosle and Jolly Mukherjee. But then the film industry has always believed that exploitation should, by rights, begin at home.

**K**iran Joneja—30-plus actress, best known for her poignant (read pathetic) role in TV soap opera *Buniyaad* has finally gone round the bend. And who can blame her? For, a mar-



Kiran Joneja: the desperation shows



Sonam: changing colours

riage that gets postponed each time she goes troussseau shopping, and a career that's more talk than fact, can pull you down a little.

Kiran's most recent manifestation of the familiar "something's terribly wrong, somewhere" syndrome was embarrassing, to put it mildly. While doing a photo session for an advertisement, Kiran requested the producer to allow her to keep a particular dress for a few days as she wanted to wear it for some function. After a couple of days, when the producer called back to ask for his dress, Kiran pretended to be out. Eventually Kiran's secretary spoke to the producer to tell him that he could have the dress back but there was a slight hitch. He would have to pay!

The producer is still completely mystified about the turn of events.



Sunny Deol: the jiving Jat

**G**uess who was most thrilled when the sexy Sonam chose to drop out of the charity show organised in Delhi by Pehlaj Nihalani? None other than the shy Jat Sunny Deol.

With good reason. For, gyrating with him to the beat of *Oye oye* would be

none other than the auburn-haired temptress Dimple Kapadia.

**S**onam is now a changed person. Gone are the days when she created date problems for Shashi Kapoor's *Ajooba* and demanded her full signing amount and advance payment before she commenced work.

The new, improved Sonam is a model star. The actress has completed all her work including dubbing for the film without complaint. Even Shashi admits she has changed a lot, reported for work on time, etc. etc.

And if inside reports are to be believed, she has even foregone the payments due to her like the other stars of the film, Amitabh, Dimple, and Rishi had done earlier. Could this mean that the infamous Rajiv Rai influence is waning at last?

**I**f her 20th birthday, on 11 May, was anything to go by, Pooja Bedi can look forward to a lot of adventure in the year ahead. The actress and her friends were spending the day on an isolated suburban beach. And suddenly, a white Maruti with three toughies started swerving very close to the girls. Sensing danger, Pooja and her friends climbed back into their cars, eager to drive back into town.

What followed was a car chase out of your favourite Hindi film, complete with sharp swerves, U-turns and much overtaking. Luckily the girls came across a police checkpost and the cops were able to nab the culprits. The harrowing incident, however, was not enough to dampen Pooja's spirits. She was back to being her normal bubbly self the next day, while the pranksters, a lot worse for the wear and tear, were safely locked up in a police cell. •



# Back from the brink

*Tamil Nadu police rescue 824 prostitutes from Bombay's brothels*

**T**his is the time of the year when tourists cram the health resorts of Madras and the Indian Railways run special trains to cope with the summer rush. But on 30 May, the special train that arrived from Bombay was packed with a very different kind of guests. 824 prostitutes rescued by the Tamil Nadu police from brothels in Bombay. Promised rehabilitation by the Karunanidhi government, these unfortunate women had decided to quit the world of sin and settle down to a respectable life.

When the special train, aptly named 'Mukthi' (Freedom), entered platform number ten of the Madras Central Station on 30 May, a reception team led by the state social welfare minister, Subbulakshmi Jagadeesan, was already there to receive the women. Besides, senior government officials, a posse of top policemen and newsmen too turned up to cover the occasion. Even a Doordarshan team was despatched to record the event, which, according to the state's director general of police, P. Dorai, was the biggest rescue operation of that kind undertaken by any state government. "The rehabilitation scheme for them will cost Rs 7.18 lakhs," explained Subbulakshmi, stressing the chief minister's personal interest in social welfare schemes for the uplift of women in Tamil Nadu.

But how did the Tamil Nadu cops manage to rescue the women from the red light areas of distant Bombay? According to P. Dorai, they were tipped off by a Bombay-based social service organisation, Saudhan, which informed the authorities in Madras that a host of Tamil women were languishing in the brothels of the city. Acting on the information, a special police team from Tamil Nadu—which included quite a few women officers and constables—was promptly despatched to Bombay. They rounded up about 1,500 women who were all from Tamil Nadu, but only 824 girls agreed to return home. "We got help from the Maharashtra police and the volunteers of Saudhan during the rescue operation," informed Dorai.

The Tamil Nadu government, meanwhile, made elaborate plans to rehabilitate the rescued women. It was decided that all the girls would first be subjected to a thorough medical test—after all, most of them were likely to suffer from various sexually transmitted diseases—following which the women would be divided into groups according to their educational qualifications and job aptitudes. The purpose of this exercise was to find employment for the girls according to their skills. But those who wished to return home to their families would be allowed to do so. Moreover, destitutes

to prevent the women from fleeing by mixing with the other commuters. Later, they were taken to the makeshift reception centres in suburban Phuzal. The women—there were also 25 children with them—were unwilling to talk. They were either too tired or simply shy. The girls merely clung on to their meagre belongings—bundles of clothes or tin trunks.

**A**nd the unfortunate girls had every reason to fight shy of visitors and strangers. They were too apprehensive of what was in store for them. "I



**The women on their way to the camps: end of a nightmare?**

were planned to be put up in government remand homes in major towns of the state. In fact, much before the 824 women arrived in Madras, district officials were instructed to finalise all arrangements. The haste with which the authorities went about the whole business led many to allege that the entire exercise was actually meant to highlight chief minister Karunanidhi's concern for women and project him as an emancipator of the fair sex.

In fact, the Madras authorities did their job extremely well. As soon as the special train screeched to a halt, the policemen on duty bolted the doors of the compartments in which they were travelling. The purpose was

to prevent the women from fleeing by mixing with the other commuters. Later, they were taken to the makeshift reception centres in suburban Phuzal. The women—there were also 25 children with them—were unwilling to talk. They were either too tired or simply shy. The girls merely clung on to their meagre belongings—bundles of clothes or tin trunks.

do not know what treatment awaits me at home," said a woman in her early twenties. Originally from Salem, she was lured to Bombay by the promise of a job in a wealthy family. Instead, she landed up at a whore house in the city. But despite the best efforts of the state government, the women were not too happy with the arrangements in Madras. The living quarters in Phuzal were not at all spacious and many of the inmates even complained that they led a better and cosy life in Bombay. Also, water was scarce and the civic amenities at the camp were poor. "Just let us go," many of the girls pleaded with the wardens.





**The haste with which the authorities went about the rehabilitation work led many to believe that the whole exercise was meant to highlight chief minister Karunanidhi's concern for women's welfare**

In fact, the officials had a tough time pacifying them. The women were somewhat placated after the camp authorities promised them better facilities and freedom to decide their future once the medical tests were over. A couple of days later, Subbulakshmi was informed that nine of them wanted jobs or training facilities in the state social welfare department. Some even wanted to go home and live with their families. And everyone

desired that the policemen guarding the camp should go.

Much to the comfort of the government, several parents and relatives of the girls turned up at Phuzal and the Government General Hospital (where the women were being treated) to identify their daughters and wards, and take them home. "It is really ironic that my daughter should land up in a brothel. She had gone to look for a job in Bombay," said one of the

distressed fathers in the hospital verandah, hardly succeeding to conceal his emotions.

But however good the intentions of the government might be, the authorities are already facing problems. For one, they cannot forcibly detain the women, nor can they thrust social welfare schemes upon the unwilling. "We are trying to talk to them and their families and we hope they will all reform. But it will take time. After all, these women have just undergone a shocking experience," said a senior government official.

The government authorities, however, have been somewhat relieved by the gesture of a number of young men of the state, many of them, including a Congress party worker, have come forward with marriage proposals. Moreover, several voluntary organisations too have agreed to help out the government to rehabilitate the women. Only time will tell whether the Tamil Nadu government's bold step will help the women to come out of the world of darkness. ●

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras**

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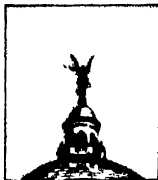
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# The god that failed

*Subash Ghisingh's popularity plummets in Darjeeling*



WEST BENGAL

Darjeeling is heading for a winter of discontent, which could culminate in the fall of the first Hill Council. With dissidence mounting within the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), and the Left Front government of West Bengal breathing down his neck, Gorkha National Hill Council (GNHC) chairman and party leader Subash Ghisingh will have to do something very dramatic to stifle the increasingly strident voices of dissent and the growing discontent in the hills. But his detractors maintain that Ghisingh will have to resign from the GNHC "well before his terms ends in 1993". Some of them feel he will not survive the next winter.

Ever since the Hill Council was formed after four years of turmoil in the hills, there were expectations of material benefit, especially by those who had fought and suffered during the struggle for statehood. "When you win a football match, you expect to be awarded prizes. But here in the hills the match was won by some and the prizes taken away by others." This was the sentiment expressed by S.N. Pradhan, the closest aide of Ghisingh during the years of struggle and negotiations.

Thoroughly disillusioned, Pradhan has started a movement called the GNLF Bachao Samiti. "We are not a breakaway group, but we do feel the time has come for a lot of questions to be answered. We are working from within the organisation to cleanse it of people who have no commitment to the people."

This is not an easy task. Ghisingh's opponent from the time he retracted the demand for statehood and settled for the Hill Council, Kalimpong's Chhatra Subba, is at present forming a splinter group himself. His volunteer cell has now become the Gorkha Liberation Organisation to which members are being admitted through formal application forms and receipted contributions.



Subash Ghisingh: on a razor's edge

Contending for leadership is another Pradhan, C.K., whose differences at the outset of the agitation in the hills with Subba gave Ghisingh the leverage to oust him from the mainstream. C.K. Pradhan also has a sizeable number of supporters in the hills.

But what is most ominous for the GNLF is the re-entry of the state's Left Front partners, particularly the CPI(M), into the politics of the hills. It seemed a paradox that, immediately after the GNLF organised a 48-hour bandh in protest against the state administration, the communists held a meeting and took out a procession in Kurseong.

Political observers feel that the state government has deliberately taken the policy of giving the Hill Council a long rope by giving it several concessions. But whether or not the council hangs itself with it will depend to a great extent on the handling of finances.

Ghisingh's doling out of contracts to appease several diehard supporters has threatened to boomerang. He has

dispensed with formal procedures like floating tenders and keeping track records of contractors. Instead, verbal go-aheads have been enough to start work on a project with finance being given in fits and starts. It is alleged that most of these so-called contractors have no previous work experience and have themselves "sold" the jobs to sub-contractors. The latter—usually experienced hands—had hoped to make tidy profits but the original contractors have started keeping their accounts and siphoning off funds at their discretion, leaving a spectre of great loss to the few people who know what they are doing.

The effect of all this is already being reflected in the hillside. Roads are being widened unnecessarily, some paths leading to nowhere—like the approach road to the Mahakal temple—stand gaping at the skies and temples of waste—like the crudely opulent seat of power in the hills, Lal Kuthi—bear testimony to the policy of waste pursued by Ghisingh. Regularisation of accounts in such an atmos-



where is impossible, which is one of the reasons why the state administration has been clamouring for accounts from the council for a long time.

And it is on this plank that the new agitation is based. A blanket poster campaign, coupled with regular insertions in the only Nepali language daily, have served to acquaint the public of the "misdeeds" of the present council. The effect of this is already being felt. Over the past six months, public response to Ghisingh's open-air meetings have been abysmally poor. In Teesta Bazar, for example, where over 100,000 people would assemble to hear their leader, there were less than a hundred people attending the meeting this time.

Resentment in the hills is high on issues other than finance, too. "At the talks in Delhi, Ghisingh refused the offer of a university in the hills. This was in direct contrast with our original manifesto," said S N Pradhan. The only possible reason is that Ghisingh, who finds it difficult to express himself in Bengali, Hindi and English, was afraid of intellectuals making inroads into his domain.

But the issue next in importance to that of financial jugglery is that of language. Ghisingh, it is alleged, insisted on substituting the word Nepali for "Gorkhali"—one stroke of the pen that nipped the aspirations of the entire hill people. "How many Gorkhali speaking people are there?" asks one Nepali. "Perhaps 20 per cent of the population. Why did Ghisingh do this—so that the long agitation for the recognition of Nepali can be easily snuffed out by the central government? We will not let this happen. We will continue our agitation and, this time, we can do without Ghisingh and his men."

All the cards are not, perhaps, on the table. But the indications are clear. The three-pronged attack from within his organisation will make life difficult for Ghisingh because he cannot remain silent indefinitely. The largest chunk of labourers—in the tea gardens—have given up hopes of an increase in their wages as promised by Ghisingh. They, along with the increasing number of unemployed youths, are now gearing for another round of unrest. Since their intentions have been made clear just before the state government has sanctioned another Rs 11 crores after much bickering on both sides, Ghisingh and his Hill Council will have to tread softly. And very carefully. •

**Arijit Sen/Darjeeling**

## Sorry, sir!

*The army arrests The Telegraph correspondent in Srinagar by mistake and embarrasses the Centre*



JAMMU & KASHMIR

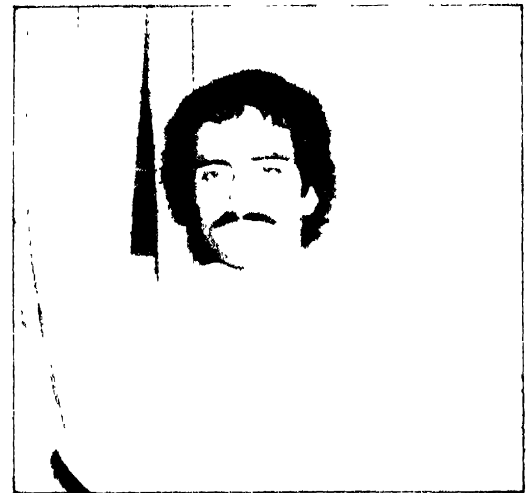
In Srinagar, Yusuf Jameel is a household name. His despatches for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) are carefully monitored and widely appreciated in the Valley. On 2 June, the 32-year-old Srinagar correspondent of *The Telegraph* (he also strings for BBC and Reuter) hit the headlines in quite a different way—he was picked up by the army and released 29 long hours later.

Jameel's colleagues and friends in Delhi were shocked when senior government officials denied the involvement of any official agency in the incident. The officials even went a step further to allege that Jameel was not arrested by the army, administration, or any investigating agency, but was kidnapped, in an attempt to "malign the Indian government" by elements who were interested in using the incident as a "trick to gain international publicity."

When news of Jameel's arrest by the army (there were five eyewitnesses) reached Delhi around noon on 2 June (Jameel was whisked away around 7.30 that morning after 15-20 army jawans jumped out of a Jonga and two Shaktiman army trucks to surround his government house in Pratap Bagh and arrest him without a warrant or chargesheet), frantic attempts were made to ascertain his whereabouts and get him released. It seemed like the Cabinet was on vacation: the Prime Minister, the home minister, the defence minister, the external affairs minister and the railways minister (who was till recently also the special minister for Kashmir affairs) were all out of town. The energy and civil aviation minister, Arif Mohammad Khan, however, expressed concern

and contacted the concerned authorities. He spoke to the core commander of Srinagar area, General M A Zaki, who informed the minister that the army had nothing to do with Jameel's disappearance. When the Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande, was contacted, he categorically ruled out army involvement and said that an impromptu inquiry had already been completed by the home secretary, Narish Chandra.

In Srinagar, the newly-appointed Governor, Girish Chandra Saxena, told Reuter's chief correspondent



**Yusuf Jameel: a 29-hour ordeal**

Michael Battye, that "it is as much of a surprise for me as it is for you. Normally, such arrests are approved by me, but I have no knowledge of it." Reuter put out a release that day, quoting an eyewitness—a constable of the Jammu and Kashmir police—as saying: "They (the men who arrested Jameel) were definitely of the Indian army and there were some Gorkha types. They were carrying Indian Army registered SLRs and stenguns." The BBC, quoting eyewitnesses, also repeatedly alleged that the Indian army was involved. Yet, the government adamantly stuck to its stand. On Doordarshan that evening, it announced that Jameel had been kidnapped by "unidentified terrorists." That categorical statement had frightening implications and *The Telegraph*



filed a habeas corpus writ late that night

Twenty-four hours after the top-brass bureaucracy had all but washed its hands off the case, it had to eat its words. Even as Supreme Court counsels Gopal Subramaniam and Mukul Mudgal (assisted by Ramji Srinivasan) presented their case before the vacation judge, Justice Lalit Mohan Sharma, a shaken but safe Jameel returned to a hero's welcome to his residence-cum-office at Pratap Bagh. The tense wait was over, and those who had maintained that the army was responsible, stood vindicated.

The same afternoon, the home secretary sceptically read out Yusuf Jameel's statement to the press at an impromptu conference in his North Block office. Minutes later, the deputy home minister, Subodh Kant Sahay, was forced to completely reverse the government's stand. He claimed that Jameel had indeed been taken into custody by an army unit at Baramulla for interrogation, but released when they discovered that he was "the wrong person".

According to Jameel it is more likely that the army and the government panicked and released him in a hurry. This was no case of "mistaken identity" as the government would have people believe, but sheer bungling. Jameel reveals that two officers of the Gorkha Rifles walked into his drawing room and said "We are not arresting you, but we are taking you somewhere to talk". They blindfolded him, and tied his hands behind his back at various stages of the interrogation, which, interestingly, pertained to another journalist, Zafar Meraj, Jameel's neighbour and friend. "We raided your house and found one K.I.F sticker," the officer told Jameel. He went on to explain that Ayub, a militant who was arrested by the army, had disclosed that "arms were to be given to Zafar". But Jameel told the officer that Zafar was in Delhi, and stoutly denied that he had any connection with the matter. Finally, the officer relented and Jameel was set free.

He was given Rs 50 by the army and was taken from the border town of Uri and dropped at a bus-stand in Baramulla, from where he returned home. The ordeal had ended without any harm being done to Jameel. But the incident once more highlighted the government's inept handling of the Kashmir situation.

**Shiraz Siddiqui/New Delhi**

## Asset or liability?

*Biju Patnaik declares his wealth, but the gesture raises more questions than it answers*



ORISSA

Just how rich is chief minister (CM) Biju Patnaik? This frequently asked, but seldom answered, question has surfaced once again, ironically after Patnaik joined his ministerial colleagues and "declared" his assets.

Patnaik's property statement merely leaves the public confused about how much their CM owns. Apparently living up to his promise to declare his assets, Patnaik has handed the press a

Rs 3.42 lakhs, has raised eyebrows even in his own party, the Janata Dal. Patnaik had sold about half his Delhi property five years ago and many refuse to believe that his remaining property is worth only Rs 3.42 lakhs. They would like him to disclose how much he received by selling off a part of the property as well as the value of his inherited property at Cuttack and of his wife's house at Bhubaneswar.

What baffles people most, however, is Patnaik's disclosure that he has borrowed a total of Rs 50 lakhs from Delhi-based builders (Rs 25



**Biju Patnaik: where has the money gone?**

copy of his wealth tax returns, that, too, of the 1988-89 assessment year, showing his wealth as on 31 March 1988. It shows that he had a "net wealth" of Rs 4.26 lakhs two years ago. But that does not disclose what the people are truly interested in—whether Patnaik has become any richer or poorer in the last two years.

In his declaration, for example, Patnaik has not added to his assets the value of his New Delhi house at 3 Aurangzeb Road. Nor has he, unlike other ministers, disclosed the worth of his parental house, Anand Bhawan, at Cuttack, or his wife Gyan Patnaik's house at Bhubaneswar, where he stays.

The declared cost of Patnaik's Delhi house, valued for wealth tax returns at

lakhs from Taj Property Pvt. Ltd, Rs 13 lakhs from Decent Property Pvt. Ltd and Rs 12 lakhs from Decent Builders Pvt. Ltd.) This amount is shown as part of his "liabilities" totalling Rs 54.46 lakhs, which also include a loan of Rs four lakhs from Allahabad Bank.

At the same time, Patnaik has a fixed deposit of Rs 35 lakhs in Allahabad Bank which he shows as part of his assets of Rs 58.73 lakhs. Why he borrowed such huge sums from private builders when he had this fixed deposit is not clear. Does he enjoy a lower rate of interest from the builders than the bank? And what did he do with the money?

Patnaik also needs to explain his expensive lifestyle in the absence of



known sources of a substantial income. No one is convinced that the interest he gets from the fixed deposit is good enough for his lavish expenses. According to his statement, Patnaik had an additional Rs 3.43 lakhs in cash two years ago. What happened to this in the last couple of years remain unexplained.

The money Patnaik has lent to others amounts to Rs 38.68 lakhs, and this is shown as "book debts". This includes about Rs 12.5 lakhs to his party and Rs 4.57 lakhs to his elder son, Prem Patnaik. Gossip in political and bureaucratic quarters marvels at how Patnaik's "investment" on his party has started to pay "dividends", now that he has staged a comeback as the chief minister after 27 years.

And with Biju Patnaik's integrity being questioned once again, popular opinion might swing against him, if

**The euphoria over the vigilance raids on the house of J.B. Patnaik is about to be replaced by a nagging suspicion about Biju's own integrity**

issues like the income tax case about his Kalinga Trust Foundation are revived. A former Congress(I) minister, Niranjan Patnaik, who was among those whose houses were raided, has already challenged the CM to disclose details about this case. The allegation is that Biju Patnaik set up the trust with his unaccounted money to the tune of several crores and not with funds collected from donors. And now ex-CM J.B. Patnaik has written a strong letter to Prime Minister V.P. Singh against the vigilance raids, calling Biju Patnaik a tax-dodger.

Thus, the euphoria over vigilance raids on the houses of the former CM is about to be replaced by a nagging suspicion about Biju Patnaik's own integrity. Coupled with signs of the government's failure on different fronts, this might revive unpleasant memories. And the lavish CM could have a hard time trying to fight the corrupt image that cost him his seat in the Sixties. •

Sarada P. Nanda/Bhubaneswar

## The vanishing green

*The Pawar regime is caught in a controversy over land deals in a Bombay suburb*



MAHARASHTRA

Chief minister Sharad Pawar is once again in the murky limelight. And once again the issue is fishy land deals. The Pawar government's steps to make City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO)—already involved in a scandal regarding alleged irregularities in land sale—the special planning authority for the Vasai-Virar sub-region, sparked off heated discussions in the state recently.

Barely 50 kms from Bombay, the Vasai taluka, consisting of the Vasai, Virar and Nala-Sopara townships, has witnessed haphazard building activities in the recent past. Efforts to demolish existing buildings and halt further construction of illegal houses encroaching upon arterial roads were killed by Madan Bafna, former minister for home and urban land ceiling. And the present ministry has reinstated S.V. Lotlikar, who was earlier suspended following a landscam, as the chief executive officer of CIDCO. At the time of his suspension, Lotlikar

was the estate manager of CIDCO. Among the irregularities Lotlikar was charged with was the allotment of an eight-acre plot to Sakal, a newspaper group owned by Pawar's family.

On 14 May, Pawar's government issued a notification saying that although the Bombay Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA) was appointed the special planning authority for the Vasai-Virar



Sharad Pawar: landing in trouble

## In safe custody

*Cops give shelter to an abandoned baby in Bombay*

When Rajiv Tipnis set out for his morning walk on 25 May, he had no inkling of what lay in store for him. As he walked down the promenade at Carter Road, Bandra, at a brisk pace, he suddenly heard the wails of an infant and stopped short. For, the cries were coming from the direction of some shrubs. A quick investigation revealed that a new-born baby, swaddled in white sheets, had been abandoned. Horror-struck, Tipnis raced to the nearest police station, Khar, and informed sub-inspector Vasant Sonawane of his discovery.

In a matter of minutes, the police swung into action, rescued the in-

fant from her unsafe perch and whisked her away to the Bhabha Hospital in Bandra. The doctors informed the rescue squad that the girl-child was barely three-days old and prescribed some medicines for her, which Tipnis rushed off to get. Sonawane, and his senior, inspector D.N. Kharay, instantly launched a search to trace the child's parents. And the child's plight got ample coverage in the evening papers. As the days passed, though the police received a number of phone calls enquiring about the child and her welfare—some even expressed their willingness to adopt her—there was no claimant for the child.



sub-region in 1988, "upon fresh consideration of all relevant circumstances the government of Maharashtra considers that it will be more appropriate for the objective of achieving proper and balanced development of the area to appoint the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra to be the special planning authority in place of BMRDA." As a result, about 2,000 to 3,000 acres of land were brought under the urbanisable zone. Obviously, the government feels that it will be easier to release land to builders through the CIDCO than the BMRDA.

What has incensed the locals, however, are rumours that these two or three thousand acres, reserved in the "G" (green) zone have already been allotted to some influential people such as the Rahejas, Hiranandanis, Diwans and Mittals. The general apprehension is that the government is basically trying to accommodate the builders, who were disappointed by the earlier Bombay High Court stay order on the 288 plots that the government sought to dereserve in Bombay last year.

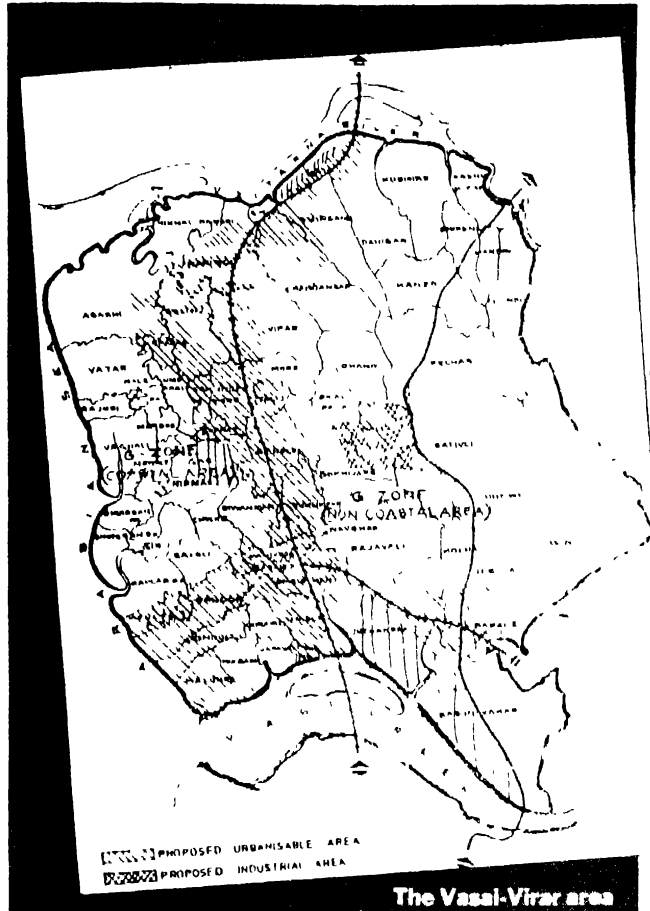
The Vasai taluka is caught between the building and anti-building lobbies. Of the latter, the Haren Vasai Protection Society, the Vasai Wachwa Samiti and other environmentalists are quite active. Sudhir Phadke, president of the Vasai Wachwa Samiti, insists that the government has no need for any

more land. In August 1988, he says, more than 20,000 acres were shifted from the "G" to the "R" (residential) zone—i.e. from *khar* (marshes that provide natural drainage) to urbanisable land.

Besides, in the absence of infrastructural facilities like water and transport, some 20,000 illegal flats lie vacant. Another 4,311 flats are still under construction. And those who live there, do not have it easy either. Water is big business here, with an annual turnover estimated at Rs four crores. Each family spends a minimum of Rs 250 per month for a tanker of water.

Although aware of the problems,

Vijay Anand Patil, secretary of Vasai Vikas Rozgar Bachao Samiti, says that the construction activities have given employment to over one and a half



Meanwhile, Sonawane and Kharay had yet another problem on their hands: the doctors at Bhabha Hospital wanted to discharge the infant as she had recovered and, pressed for space, the hospital authorities could no longer keep her in their intensive care unit. The policemen approached the Manav Seva Sangh (MSS), to take care of the girl, but the MSS officials "didn't want to get mixed up in a case that involved court hassles". So she was moved instead to the Shraddhanand Mahila Ashram (SMA). The police officials had even planned a naming ceremony for the baby on 2 June, but it was cancelled after the SMA officials objected, as it didn't conform to their rules.

But as Kharay points out, "The policemen had already named her Bharati and were initially excited

about holding a small ceremony at the police station itself and distributed *pedhas*, etc." While Bharati may have missed out on the celebration, she has been the centre of media attention. "The baby is both fortunate and unfortunate," says Kharay, "and since her parents haven't yet come forward to claim her, we're her claimants as well as her parents." But Bharati's fate is to be decided by the judicial magistrate who will rule whether she goes into a remand home like many other unfortunate, abandoned children, or whether she is put up for adoption. Or, perhaps, if she is lucky, there may still be a happy conclusion to the story: her parents may have a change of heart and come forward to claim their daughter. But with each passing day, that possibility becomes more and more remote. \*

**Aditi Chatterjee / Bombay**

lakh people and that it would be difficult to stop them now. "We have taken loans for about 72 crores from three cooperative banks," he explains, "and will be unable to repay them if this building activity is stopped." On the other hand, Phadke argues that construction on *khar*, which provides natural drainage to the lush western periphery of this taluka, would ruin the rich vegetation on the land.

The housing business is primarily in the hands of local builders. Some of them merely serve as fronts for bigger businessmen. Among the Bombay builders reportedly involved are Hiranandani (with 1,200 acres) and Raheja and Diwan (both with 150 acres). The politicians whose names keep coming up in the affair are Ram Rao Adik, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Nakul Patil and, of course, Pawar.

After all this, the 14 May notification making CIDCO the deciding authority on land sale might worsen the situation. People feel that once CIDCO starts laying down the parameters of land use, the money-making syndrome of dereservation might begin all over again. \*

**Olga Tellis/Bombay**



# To plus-two

*The academic climate heats up as the LDF tries to push through its new education policy*



KERALA

In Kerala, the most literate state in the country, education is not only big business but also a major political issue that can upset governments. The ruling Left Democratic Front's (LDF) decision to introduce the plus-two system (PTS) in schools in order to delink the pre-degree courses from the universities has stirred a hornet's nest.

The decision, according to the state education minister, is in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the University Grants Commission (UGC), but the Congress(I)-led Opposition in the state has raised an outcry against the policy.

In fact, the Congress(I) is trying to settle old scores with the LDF. Four years back, when T.M. Jacob, the former education minister in the United Democratic Front (UDF) government, headed by K. Karunakaran, tried to introduce the same system and decided to set up a board for the pre-degree courses, the LDF began a widespread agitation to scuttle the move.

The LDF movement against the UDF policy was spearheaded by the predominantly Marxist university employees, who adopted the tactics of delaying the publication of the PTS results that year in order to pressure the UDF into submission. But the Karunakaran regime thought it could have its way by by-passing the university employees and made alternative arrangements for the publication of the results. Unfortunately for the UDF, the effort ended in a major fiasco, with gross irregularities being discovered in the declared results.

It was largely because of this scandal that the UDF was trounced in the 1987 Assembly elections. But four years later, the LDF, which rode to power on the crest of the anti-PTS agitation, has decided to do a volte-face. Education minister K. Chandrashekhara is trying to introduce more or less the same scheme that Jacob had drawn up.

Chandrashekhara has been justify-

ing his stand by saying that the PTS was being introduced to implement the UGC scheme for college teachers. The UGC has stipulated that pre-degree classes be delinked from university education. The government plans to introduce the PTS in one government school in each of the 31 educational districts in the state. However, Chandrashekhara has added that the pre-degree courses in colleges would continue under the universities till they are fully replaced with the PTS in schools. The PTS would be placed under the director of public instructions and would not affect the college teachers.

Strangely, Chandrashekhara now feels that the introduction of the PTS was long overdue. One of the reasons why the PTS became unavoidable is that the number of seats offered in pre-degree courses by the colleges is far too inadequate to cope with the pressure for admissions. This has led

Chandrashekhara: changing tack



to the mushrooming of private colleges in the state, a phenomenon that is resented by most university vice chancellors. Moreover, a record 56 per cent pass in the school leaving examination this year aggravated the crisis and the government was forced to introduce the PTS, as thousands of students would have landed up in private colleges otherwise. In addition, the government's financial position (the LDF spends about 50 per cent of the state's revenue on education) is precarious. It was in no position, therefore, to lose the mass of students to private institutions. And, to make the private schools less viable, Chandrashekhara has declared that the PTS would not be introduced in them.

Another factor that influenced the LDF to abandon its earlier stand of opposing the introduction of the PTS in schools is the high incidence of drug addiction in colleges. Says Chandrashekhara, "I was shocked and pained at seeing the amount of drug addiction among college students. It was one of the reasons that prompted the government to introduce the PTS so that students can be retained in school for a longer period."

Meanwhile, T.M. Jacob, who is at present an MLA, has demanded that the LDF should issue an apology for having launched an agitation against the previous UDF regime on this issue. Said K.C. Venugopal, president of the Kerala Students' Union (KSU-I) Students Federation of India: "The (students wing of the CPI-M) had stoutly opposed the move earlier. What have they to say now about the latest move of the government?" The KSU(I) and the Congress(I) have jointly planned to launch a fierce campaign against the LDF's policy, and seem determined to pay the LDF back in its own coin.

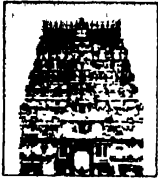
The LDF, on the other hand, is gearing up to foil the Congress(I)'s agitation plans. The CPI(M) state secretary, V.S. Achutanandan, has urged the people to back the LDF on this issue and has asked the powerful university unions to fall in line with the official policy. Says Achutanandan about the LDF's decision: "It (the PTS) is not only distinct from the scheme evolved by the previous government but also conforms with the national pattern." But the Congress(I) is unlikely to give up without a fight and it seems that the academic atmosphere is going to heat up in the coming months. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Thiruvananthapuram**



# Taking a stand

*The DMK government bans a pro-LTTE convention in Thanjavur*



TAMIL NADU

Tamils seem to have a natural liking for tigers. In Thanjavur and several other towns in southern Tamil Nadu, posters have appeared which state "In the land where the tiger-flag fluttered during the Chola period, there will now be a meeting of the friends of the Tigers for proclaiming the right to self-determination." The posters were splashed in connection with a conference that was to be held from 9-10 June in Thanjavur organised by the Tamizhar Desiya Iyakkam (Tamil Nationalist Movement).

The Iyakkam is headed by the former Congressman, P. Nedumaran, who is said to be closer to the Sri Lankan militant Tamil outfit, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It was, in fact, Nedumaran who had internationalised the Lankan ethnic problem. In 1983, the former Congress leader had led a 'long march' from Madurai to the coastal town of Rameswaram, and was arrested after he jumped into the sea in a professed attempt to swim across the Palk Straits to Sri Lanka.

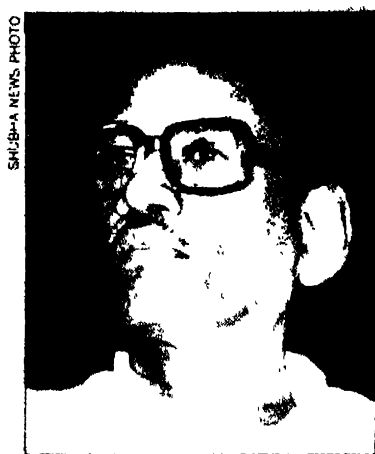
The choice of Thanjavur as the venue for the conference was significant because much of the LTTE's activities in Tamil Nadu are concentrated along the Thanjavur coast, which is closest to the northern Jaffna peninsula in Sri Lanka.

A spate of recent meetings and conferences held by the pro-LTTE organisations has been making waves in the media and drawing criticism from such parties as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been accusing the DMK government, headed by chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi of turning a blind eye to an overtly secessionist campaign in the state. The state BJP president, V. Vijayaraghavulu, has reacted sharply to the goings-on in the state. He has shot a telegram to Prime Minister V. P. Singh, complaining against the DMK government for having given permission to the Iyakkam to hold the Thanjavur conference.

The conference, Nedumaran claimed, was only aimed at pressuring the Centre into giving more powers to the states and denied any separatist designs. He was particularly piqued at the BJP's attempt to sabotage the conference from the beginning. He seemed even more annoyed at the DMK government which, he said, was "playing a double role" on the Lankan issue. On the one hand, Karunanidhi

a jolt when the state home secretary, R. Nagarajan, announced late on 6 June that the Thanjavur conference had been banned because it was found that certain photographs, posters and banners exhibited at the conference venue could affect the relations between the governments of India and Sri Lanka and also between the Tamils of the two countries. Later, chief minister M. Karunanidhi, however, told the media that the government had not given any permission to the Iyakkam to hold the conference in the first place, and so the question of withdrawing it did not arise.

Meanwhile, the police seized some 25 photographs from an exhibition which was being held at the venue of the conference besides arresting three



Nedumaran and a poster of the conference: a call for self-determination



was speaking of the atrocities committed on the Tamils in Sri Lanka and, on the other, he was banning the conference and the exhibition, regretted Nedumaran.

However, the DMK government stuck to its stand and took the Iyakkam chief into preventive custody on the eve of the conference. The state police also dismantled the *pandal* put up at the venue and a large police picket was posted there. Government sources revealed that the banning order followed a note of warning issued by the Union home ministry which expressed concern at the laxity shown by the state administration in countering such 'separatist' tendencies in the past one year. But for this communique from Delhi, the DMK government would have turned a blind eye at this conference, the sources stated.

However, the BJP's outcry forced the government out of its stupor. The Iyakkam chief, Nedumaran, received

Iyakkam office-bearers. Nedumaran reacted angrily to this move and declared that he would defy the ban and hold the conference, which he claimed, was not intended to hurt the unity and integrity of India or Indo-Lankan relations.

Nedumaran pointed out that the photographs seized by the police had been circulating in Tamil Nadu for a long time. "In fact, some of these pictures have been published in *Murasoli*, the official organ of the DMK. Why make a fuss over them now?" asked Nedumaran, who has all along been a virulent critic of Karunanidhi's new-found love for the LTTE.

Apparently, Karunanidhi has acted in time to prevent the Thanjavur conference under Delhi's pressure. But it remains to be seen whether he will be able to take adequate steps to root out the nascent Tamil separatism altogether. •

R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras



# The slanging match

*The Association of Indian Cricketers confronts the Board*

Indian cricket is all set to enter a new phase. And as in the past when amateurism gave way to the more down-to-earth cash transactions, there are elements of confusion, heartburn and misunderstandings. But the moves made by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) hold out the promise of a better future both for the game and its players.

Cricket and its administration have both been altered through the years in order to keep pace with the changing time. When the "gentlemen" condescended to meet the "players", there was a tacit understanding that amateurism was still in vogue. Gradually, cricket became a profession for some, which gained prominence when Kerry Packer revolutionised the very concept of the sport.

Since then, day-night games, double-wicket competitions and the like have served to provide players with a leverage to enhance income and make the game really lucrative. As a result, Test cricket has lost its premier position, and internationals no longer mean just the five-day variety of the game.

All these and more have gone into the working of the minds of Indian cricketers who have long felt the need for a better bargaining position vis-à-vis the Board. They won an important battle in the Supreme Court, only to realise that it was a Pyrrhic victory—because the Board struck back in no uncertain terms. Some of the leading players in the country found themselves out in the cold. New captains were appointed, only to see themselves dumped in the very next round of matches.

These developments led to a hardening of attitudes. The players did not make the mistake of crying for public mercy as they had done initially. And they substituted complacency with quiet resolve. They formed an Association of Indian Cricketers (AIC) with clear-cut objectives. Some of their aims were praiseworthy, while others were dictated by the need to protect their interests.

The BCCI's working committee

meeting in New Delhi early this month, used a combination of logic and law to strike down the association. "The aims and objectives of the AIC (are) in conflict with the BCCI's constitution," the working committee said. So, there was no question of granting recognition to it. The BCCI secretary, Ranbir Singh, said the committee had discussed the issue "minutely" before arriving at its decision.

But the Board agreed to the long-standing demand of the senior players to make graded payments, in accord-



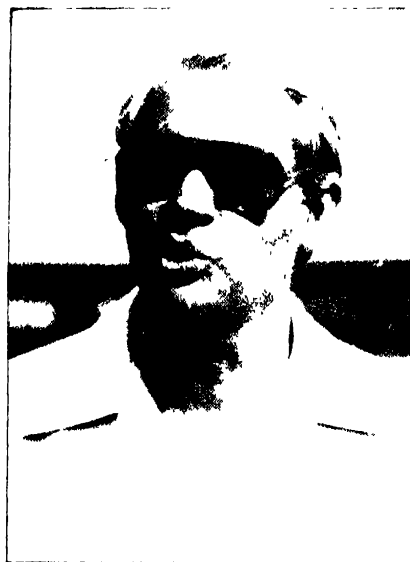
**B.N. Dutt: a rubber stamp?**

ance with their seniority. The proviso is that the players must declare themselves to be professionals. The BCCI had set up a committee to review the demands made by the players. The committee felt the Board already had a benevolent fund operating for the current players and the latter were getting interests on this. It also felt that this was an indirect gradation system and so there was no need for a review of this scheme—unless the players declared they were professionals.

In that case, a gradation system has been evolved, which states that, at the start of the scale, a player who has been capped between one and 20 times would get ten per cent more

than what he was being paid now. At the other end of the scale, a cricketer who had played more than 80 times, would be given 50 per cent more than what the Board was paying for each Test match now. A similar gradation system has also been evolved for one-day internationals. However, this system would not have a retrospective effect.

These decisions could find the players out in the cold. Not only has the Board refused to recognise their association, the players will now have to admit they are professionals. Accord-



**Raj Singh Dungarpur: under fire**

ing to cricket officials, this, in effect, means that the players would have to give up their lucrative jobs. BCCI payments to date have been on the basis of lump-sum amounts to amateurs playing the game.

But the players could take heart from the fact that working committee members found the selection of players for the ensuing tour of England to be faulty and censured the selectors led by Raj Singh Dungarpur. BCCI president B.N. Dutt said the constitution did not allow him to be more than a "mere rubber stamp" of the selection committee.

There was widespread criticism in both the media and the Board over the





**K. Srikkanth: surprise omission**

dropping of some established players, the non-inclusion of some others and the lack of foresight in the absence from the team of at least one off-spinner and one more opening batsman. It is quite likely that there will be a change in the constitution of the Board when it meets next in September. The change will incorporate the steps the Board president can take if the selection committee errs in its judgement. The president will also henceforth inform the selectors—immediately after they are elected—about the Board's policy with regard to the selection of players.

The working committee members were shocked that players like Krishnamachari Srikkanth and promising youngsters like Sourav Ganguly were ignored by the selectors. B N Dutt also disclosed how he had to put his foot down when Kapil Dev was axed from the squad selected for New Zealand earlier this year. The general feeling was that the selectors, by their whims, had eroded the confidence of the leading players in their own ability to play.

Some members of the Board have gone further. At a special general meeting of the BCCI, to be held in Bombay in August, some proposals will be discussed and, in all probability, accepted. The first of these is a qualifying standard to be fixed for selectors. The proposal states that only those cricketers who have played in a minimum of five Test matches or 25 first class ties will be eligible to be chosen as selectors.

If this proposal is passed, it will mean the end of the Raj Singhs of cricket, who have not played any worthwhile cricket but now stand as arbiters of the fate of Indian cricket in the international level. It will also mean the induction of cricketers who understand both the game and its players.

There is another proposal that seeks to limit the selectors' period in office. At the moment, a selector is elected annually, but could be appointed for a succession of four years. The new idea is to curtail this period to just two. Annual elections will stay, but no selectors could be in office for more than two years in succession.

Both these moves could help in clearing the air considerably, especially after the experience with the present crop of selectors whom Mohinder Amarnath described as a 'bunch of jokers'. •

**Arijit Sen/ Calcutta**



# Delhi's favourite games

*Some of the few sporting events India excels in*

**E**very time there is an international sporting competition of some sort, the expectations of the other major countries soar, while those of India wilt yet again. We've seen India get trounced so often that a numb kind of resignation has set in. This applies to virtually every game. Never before in the field of human sporting activity, have so many people been so bad, at so many different games, for so long.

It's not that we don't try. There is a large sports budget, ample perquisites, considerable glory, yet our sportsmen are relentless in their pur-

since no one else plays them, because there is little purpose in achieving greatness through lack of competition. The trick is to win in areas in which everybody competes. Since a talent hunt on an all-India basis would be too expensive and diffused, let us look for world beaters in and around Delhi.

**F**irst, of course, we need to identify the areas of sporting activity. To start with, we could initiate a sport to compete with the British Channel Crossing which is so revered. We could suggest Floor Crossing in its stead and the sight of the legendary Bhajan Lal standing in a *langoth* and slapping his thigh would frighten all

ready types, but takes finesse and decades of practice to reach that stage of perfection where the victim is actually pleased that the bribe he offered has graciously been taken.

We could then suggest an event in Side-Stepping Responsibility (I am not completely sure, but I think a modest start may already have been made by starting this as an optional subject at the IAS Academy in Mussoorie). Of course, many amateurs are already clogging this sport, but they would have to observe the true masters at work, whose skill lies in side-stepping without appearing to move at all. At the end of their motionless movement, the audience is so flummoxed that they depart wondering what the fuss was all about. This is known as the Botors Effect and is the equivalent of Nadia Comaneci's perfect 10 in Gymnastics.

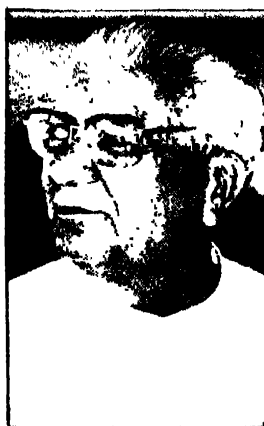
An accompanying event is called Denying You Ever Said It. This occurs a day after the papers hit the stands and some adroit souls will soon no doubt start issuing denials before they even give interviews, like that unique phenomenon called Anticipatory Bail. It is accompanied by the Passing The Buck manoeuvre in which responsibility is passed down to the lowest official available and jailable.

Then there are the purely cerebral sports. Prominent among them is the Blame The Press For It event. The true artists here are those who are able to take such unrelated items as their losing an election because the electorate doesn't like getting shot at, and blaming the capitalist press for it. Similarly there is the field of Calling The Shots Even After Resigning, in which, it is rumoured, the prize will always be called the Chautala Cup.

The above is only a tentative list and if we put our collective minds to work, we could develop a much longer one. They are events that are practised all over the world, but nowhere have they reached that pitch of blissful perfection that they have achieved here. We stand an excellent chance of sweeping the Olympic medals in these events. •



**In the field of back-stabbing there should be a nail-biting finish between Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar**



suit of failure. There could be two reasons for this. One, we may be naturally inferior at all sports; two, the games being played are not the one's at which we are masters. If the first is true, then of course there's nothing to be done, but our neighbours, Pakistan, from the same racial stock as us, are world champions at squash and cricket. Other minute countries, for example, Sweden, with a population slightly less than Delhi's, routinely produce stars in tennis and table tennis. It stands to reason therefore that we are not playing in those sports that we excel in.

It is not enough to suggest that we should play *kabaddi* and *gilli danda*,

contenders. Who else has his skill, his experience, his sheer ability? Next we could enter the realm of rifle shooting. Taking pot shots at clay pigeons is too prosaic for us, we should offer instead the toast of Meham, Ajay Singh, in the exciting new sport of Machine-Gunning Unarmed People. Our hero would be unchallenged here.

And why not try for both the gold and silver medals in the field of back-stabbing. It should be a nail-biting finish between the old master Devi Lal and that up and coming young Turk, Chandra Shekhar. Next we could move to the subtle sport of Bribe Extracting. This is not for the rough and



## A palace crumbles?

■ India's conservationists will never run out of passionate causes to espouse. Thanks to the government's lackadaisical approach in maintaining India's ancient monuments. The latest such furor concerns one of Delhi's most distinguished buildings, Bhagirath Palace. The monument located in Chandni Chowk is going to be demolished soon, to make way for a high-rise building. Conservationists as well as the Indian National Trust for Architectural and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) are astounded by the manner in which the government is permitting yet another historical building in the hub of the city to be razed.

Bhagirath Palace is presently the main wholesale market for electrical goods and medical instruments. Architects in the capital believe that the palace has architectural significance as



ILLUSTRATION: KRISHNENDU CHAK

it is one of the best examples of colonial buildings constructed at a time when Europe was experiencing a revival of classical Greco-Roman architecture. The only way to prevent the palace from coming down would be to take the matter to court. But as it always happens, in these cases INTACH cannot afford to get embroiled in a lengthy litigation.

## Ignorance is bliss

■ The Kani tribal belt, some 40 kms from the state capital of Kerala has remained completely

impervious to all efforts to be educated. And not surprisingly, this has perturbed officials of the state education department, who take immense pride in the state's remarkable progress in literacy programmes. The 17,000-odd tribals—Kannikaras—are as determined to remain ignorant.

Apart from the tribals themselves, the biggest problem is the hilly terrain of the region. It takes one whole day's trek to reach the interior settlements. No wonder then, that most one-day literacy surveys have bypassed many parts of the tribal stretch. The training of instructors, which is drawing to a close in other districts, is yet to take off in the tribal stretches.

At the moment, literacy officials feel that the only way to break the deadlock is by enticing the tribesmen with some material incentives like free rations, or a *dhoti*. But, given the tribals' aversion to education, they're likely to spurn this offer too.

## Sailing solo

■ "Give boat, will sail," seems to be the motto of Commodore Surrendra Kumar Mongia, who plans to circumnavigate the globe. He has the backing of the Indian Navy in this endeavour, which is expected to take 18 months. If he achieves his aim, he will be the first Indian to sail around the world alone. Previously, the *Jaykus*, *Trishna* and *Samudra* circled the globe, but with many-membered crews.

Mongia was obsessed by one passion all along—to face the challenge of the world's oceans on his own. Mongia is so confident of securing a boat and succeeding in his mission that he has already planned to write a book on his travels, based on his cruise diary. In fact, he even has a title for the book—"Tall tales of the sea" or "sailing tall". Tall talk or will the determined seaman fulfil his promises?

# MILESTONES

**RESIGNED:** P. Shiv Shankar, leader of the Congress(I) in the Rajya Sabha, on 31 May, after he was persistently defied and humiliated by his party members on the floor of the House.

**RESIGNED:** N.K.P. Salve, deputy leader of the Congress in the Rajya Sabha, on 31 May, on the same grounds.

**VISITED:** Prime Minister V.P. Singh went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to take part in the G-15 summit on 31 May.

**APPOINTED:** Pargat Singh as skipper of the 16-member Indian hockey team for the seven-nation BMW Cup tournament in Amstelveen, Holland.

**RESIGNED:** Nirmal Kumar Mukarji, Governor of Punjab, on 1 June. He had assumed office on 8 December, 1989, after the National Front government came to power.

**ABDUCTED AND RELEASED:** Yusuf Jameel, correspondent of *The Telegraph*, was picked up from his house in Srinagar on 2 June by the Indian Army personnel. He was freed on 3 June, after 29 hours in the custody of a Gorkha Rifles unit.

**ARRESTED:** Simranjeet Singh Mann, the Akali Dal(Mann) president, on 5 June, while he and his supporters were on their way to the Golden Temple, to attend a convention marking the sixth anniversary of Operation Bluestar.

**FELICITATED:** Dr Dhrubajyoti Ghosh has been in this year's Global 500 roll of honour of the United Nations Environment Programme. Dr Ghosh is famous for the remarkable campaign he has led to save Calcutta's fragile wetlands without which the city would be lost to pollution.

**ARRESTED:** The Mirwaiz of south Kashmir, Dr Qazi Nasser, from his Anantnag residence on 7 June.

**VISITED:** Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the Nepalese Prime Minister, came to New Delhi on a three-day trip for bilateral negotiations with the Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh.

**ANNIVERSARY:** The Assam Tribune celebrated its golden jubilee. This newspaper has played a distinctive role in the social, cultural and political life of the north-east.



# SUNDAY WEEK

BEGINNING 17 JUNE 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



This week you may draw flak from your employers. Exercise restraint in dealing with such a situation. Otherwise the week is favourable for you. On the domestic front, you will be extremely busy.

**Good dates:** 17, 20 and 23  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** West

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



This week you will make slow but steady progress. The employed have a chance of going abroad. On the domestic front all disputes may be amicably resolved. Businessmen can embark on new ventures.

**Good dates:** 19, 21 and 22  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 5 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** South-west

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



Domestic problems will keep you occupied throughout the week. Your relatives might seek your help and advice. Your health will improve markedly. The financial front looks bright.

**Good dates:** 18, 19 and 21  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 5 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** North

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



Stellar influences make this an extremely favourable week for you. Businessmen can enter into new deals, while a promotion is likely for those in service. Children will be a source of joy.

**Good dates:** 20, 22 and 23  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 38 and 4  
**Favourable direction:** West

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



Businessmen are advised not to make fresh investments this week. However, the period is favourable for doctors, politicians and artists. Romance is in the offing. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 18, 20 and 22  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** West

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



This is not a good week for lovers. Do not pay heed to rumours and avoid disputes with your beloved. Businessmen should refrain from taking hasty decisions. A promotion is likely for those in service.

**Good dates:** 17, 19 and 21  
**Lucky numbers:** 5, 7 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** North-west

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



It is advisable to consult your elders before taking an important decision. The financial front looks bright, but check extravagance. A journey towards the end of the week may lead to financial losses.

**Good dates:** 21, 22 and 23  
**Lucky numbers:** 2, 7 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** West

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



This week elders will prove to be helpful. Do not ignore their advice especially in matters pertaining to your profession. Financially, this is a good phase. Take care of your health.

**Good dates:** 19, 20 and 22  
**Lucky numbers:** 3, 4 and 6  
**Favourable direction:** South

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



Domestic problems will be a source of worry. Your children will be particularly disobedient. You might come in for severe criticism from your superiors. But this phase will soon end. Rely on the advice of elders.

**Good dates:** 17, 18 and 19  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 3 and 5  
**Favourable direction:** North

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



A successful and busy week lies ahead of you. Your financial problems will be solved and businessmen will be able to finalise new contracts. An elderly relative will be helpful to you. The time is good for matrimonials.

**Good dates:** 18, 19 and 23  
**Lucky numbers:** 6, 7 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** East

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



Matters related to profession and business will make steady progress. Artists will be successful and sportsmen will win awards. However, the financial front is not bright. Do not indulge in gambling or speculation.

**Good dates:** 19, 22 and 23  
**Lucky numbers:** 1, 4 and 8  
**Favourable direction:** South-west

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



Success on all fronts is a near certainty this week. So utilise every opportunity that comes your way. Financially you will gain through inheritance. But check extravagance. Friends and relatives will be helpful.

**Good dates:** 20, 21 and 22  
**Lucky numbers:** 4, 6 and 9  
**Favourable direction:** North

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—VIRGO

*The Libran woman should appreciate the Virgo man's sentiments and emotions. Only then can the relationship work. She should check extravagance, as the Virgo man will expect her to account for every penny that she spends.*

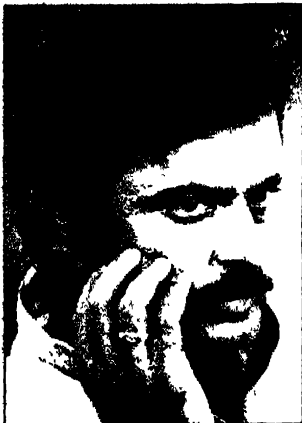


## Anwar shows cause

■ Former Bihar PCC(I) chief Tariq Anwar has got the Congress high command thinking.

Anwar formed an organisation within the party, called Jan Astha, and recently called a meeting of its members (including former Bihar CM Bhagwat Jha Azad). Jagannath Mishra, regarding this as an unseemly show of strength against him, served Anwar with a show-cause notice, asking him why he had done so, despite a ban on all such get-togethers.

Anwar had his reply ready. There was nothing in the party constitution, he said, that forbade the formation of such organisations. If that had been the case then Jagannath Mishra wouldn't have been able to form the Jan Vikas Manch; Bansi Lal his Haryana Vikas Manch; Rameshwar Neekhara and Aslam Sher



**Tariq Anwar: got them thinking**

Khan wouldn't have made an attempt to set up the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Manch. There wouldn't have been a Congress Socialist Forum headed by V.N. Gadgil, a Congress Forum of Action, Balram Jakhar's Bharat Krishak Samaj and Jaffar Sharief's Al-Amin.

Also, argued Anwar, there was nothing anti-

HEARD IN RAIL BHAVAN

**If the railways minister stayed any longer in the United States, we'd have to rename him George Washington.**

A DISGUSTED BUREAUCRAT

party about Jan Astha: it was merely an anti-communal front.

So, why was he the only one to be served with such a notice?

Did it have something to do with the Congress' chief factotum R.K. Dhawan?

## For God's sake!

■ Vice-president S.D. Sharma's magnificent obsession with religious places is well-known. And

sure enough, when he visited Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, to inaugurate an international youth fete organised by the Swaminathan sect, he decided to take in the nearby Dakore temple as well.

Leading an impressive entourage, the vice-president arrived at the shrine at 2.30 pm—a good one and a half hours before the official *darshan* was to commence.

But no, Sharma wasn't kept waiting. Instead, the deity's siesta was inter-

## THERMOMETER

### All the Punjab players

■ **Virendra Verma:** The new Governor is a Jat from Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. His appointment has been widely criticised as he has little or no expertise *vis a vis* Punjab affairs. His involvement with the state is restricted to the fact that one of his sons-in-law is a Sikh. Owes allegiance to the Tau, and the former Lok Dal (B) group, and is bound to encourage the activities of Badal

■ **Mufti Mohammad Sayeed:** As far as policy formulation on the state goes, the home minister's is merely a formal role. All reports come to his ministry but under the new dispensation, all powers have been given to the Governor. Though, he will, of course implement the Centre's policy

■ **I.K. Gujral:** The external affairs minister and MP from Punjab is soft on the Akalis. After all, they desisted from putting up a candidate against him during the election to the Lok Sabha. Consequently, Gujral is a softliner as far as Punjab affairs go. But, unfortunately, nobody pays him much attention these days

■ **Nareesh Chandra:** Leads the hardliner brigade and implements the dictates of the Arun Nehru-Mufti Mohammad Sayeed lobby. The home secretary, however, has a tough opponent in this endeavour—the Raja's favourite bureaucrat Vinod Pande

■ **Vinod Pande:** The Cabinet secretary's brief on Punjab extends to opposing every move of Nareesh Chandra. This, despite the fact that he is as much of a hardliner as his arch-enemy.

rupted to allow the visiting dignitary to pay his respects

This, while the other devotees were waiting patiently in the sweltering heat

## Timed out

■ Congress chief ministers have decided to get tough with party president Rajiv Gandhi

Recently, when Gandhi ticked off Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chenna Red-



**Sharad Pawar: making his point**

dy and Maharashtra CM Sharad Pawar for not meeting him when they were in Delhi, the erring leaders nearly chewed off their great leader's ears

Reddy retorted that he had left several requests for an appointment with Gandhi's secretary V. George, only to have them ignored. Pawar made clear that as chief minister he had plenty of work awaiting him back in Maharashtra and he couldn't afford to hang around endlessly waiting until Rajiv had a free moment

If, however, Rajiv gave him a specific date and time when they could meet, he would definitely drop in

Gandhi got the message. And the next time Pawar visited Delhi, the appointment was all too easy to make. ●



## Hindu-Hindu, bhai-bhai

As a rule, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) doesn't assign any importance to international relations. (So what if party leader Atal Behari Vajpayee was once minister for external affairs!)

Heads of state and government may come calling. Congress president Rajiv Gandhi and leaders of the left may pay them courtesy visits; but as far as the BJP is concerned, the dignitaries may never have been around.

It thus came as a surprise



**L.K. Advani: why the change of heart?**

to most when the BJP pulled all stops out when Nepalese Prime Minister, K.P. Bhattarai arrived in India on a state visit. Party president L.K. Advani, for one, remained closeted with him for over an hour.

But, perhaps, it's not so surprising, after all. Nepal is a Hindu kingdom, Nepalese banks the safest resting places for BJP funds, and such party leaders as Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia have plenty of relatives across the border.

## Dos and don'ts

Prem Shankar Jha may have been appointed information advisor to the Raja, but H.Y. Sharada Prasad has

HEARD IN THE LOK SABHA

**Every Janata Dal MP has been elected because of Bofors. Each one of them is a son of a gun.**

VASANT SATHE, CONGRESS(I) MP

taken on the role of Jha's official guardian angel.

In a letter congratulating Jha on his appointment, his predecessor Sharada Prasad enumerated several dos and don'ts that the new information advisor must follow, if he is to succeed in his job.

Partying into the late night is out; that time is best devoted to protecting the Prime Minister's in-

terests.

Cultivating certain sections of the media is out; the rest of the pack will soon be baying for your blood.

Never identify yourself too closely with any member of the PM's inner circle; the composition of his coterie changes all too often.

Jha should instead concentrate on winning over

## BAROMETER

*India's friends in the international community*



**USA:** V.P. Singh seems to be a favourite with the Americans, who believe that he will last his full term. The Americans have supported India on Kashmir and put pressure on Pakistan—which is something they would have never done in the past.



**USSR:** Gorbachev is too busy with his own problems to care about India's. The Soviets have not been too vocal on Kashmir in international forums. In the past, they would have gone out of their way to champion India's cause.



**China:** Has been surprisingly even-handed on the Kashmir issue and seems sincere about improving relations with India. V.P. Singh says that relations with China are congenial and neither side suspects the other of doing anything underhand.



**Fiji:** India's relations with this island republic have been severed and diplomatic ties suspended. India has raised strong objections to the suppression of Fijians of Indian origin. It is also opposed to Malaysia's training of the Fijian Army.



**Burma:** By overtly Burma on his way to Kuala Lumpur, V.P. Singh sent a message to Burma's military rulers, urging them to accept the democratic verdict against them and step down. India has consistently supported the pro-democracy movement in Burma and that country's military junta is consequently, extremely cool towards India. No Indian journalist has been allowed into Burma in recent times.

the vernacular press; that's the permanent power centre.

## The stars foretell

Cabinet secretary Vinod Pande is rapidly becoming the second most powerful man in the country. And his importance can be gauged by the ever-increasing number of sycophants doing obeisance to him at every available opportunity.

Minister of state for human resource development Chimanbhai Mehta is the latest entrant to the Pande



**Vinod Pande: It's all in the stars**

fan club. When the Prime Minister's entourage landed at Delhi airport after its Malaysian sojourn, Mehta—after saying a cursory *namaskar* to the Raja—zeroed in on Pande.

"I have heard that you are a great astrologer," he said.

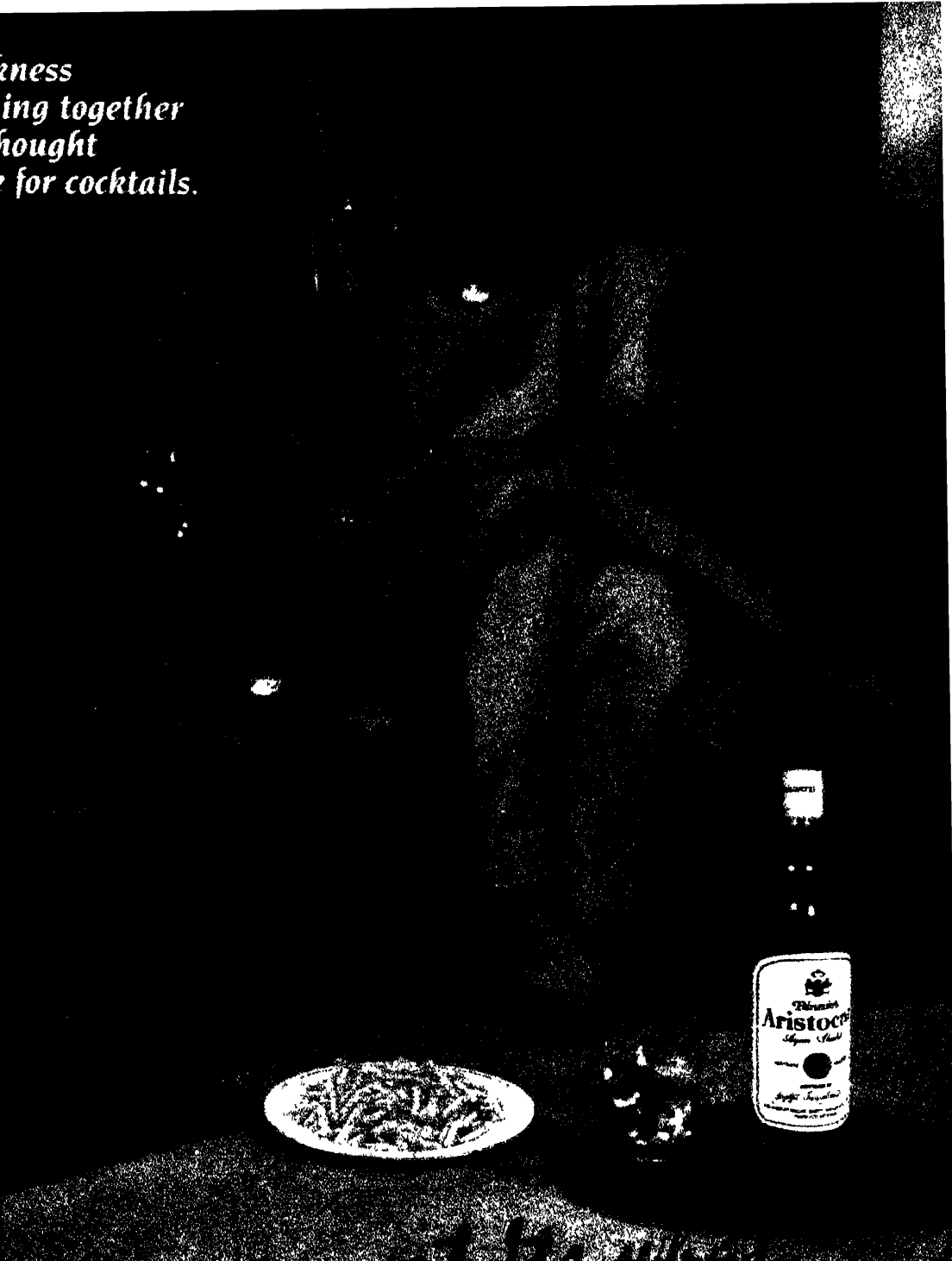
"Yes," countered a visibly pleased cabinet secretary, "but how do you know, Mr Mehta."

"Ah," replied the minister, "my wife is a great admirer of your talent and she told me about you. She wants to meet you sometime and I would like you to come to a function in Ahmedabad as chief guest."

Pande was—if appearances are anything to go by—suitably pleased.



Gathering darkness  
 A quiet evening together  
 An unspoken thought  
 And it's time for cocktails.



*Aristocrat. Its name  
 the good life is all about.*

\*Cocktail : Preparation of food, esp. as appetizer ...



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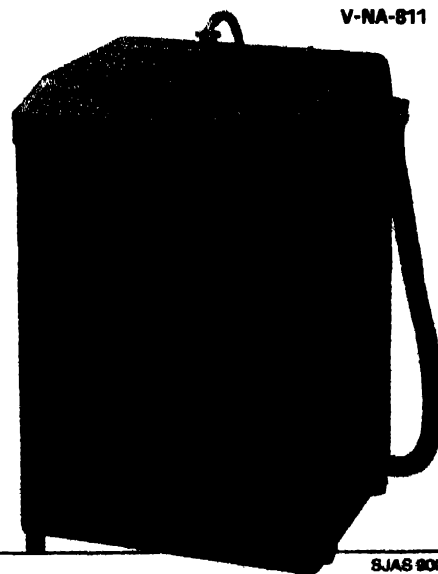
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# **VIDEOCON**

## **Washing Machine**



**V-NA-811**



**NEPAL: INDIA MENDS FENCES**

# SUNDAY

**Q: Are you in touch with Rajiv?**

**A: ~~Yes,~~  
~~of course...~~  
why, we met  
day before  
yesterday**

## ARUN NEHRU

**on Rajiv Gandhi,  
FIRs, vindictiveness  
and indignation**





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## Mending fences

The India-Nepal agreement was a personal triumph for both V.P. Singh and K.P. Bhattarai.

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## Temple politics

The LDF government in Kerala is trying to gain control of temple administrations in the Travancore-Cochin areas of the state.

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Congress president Rajiv Gandhi is touring different parts of the country in order to rejuvenate the party. But will he succeed?



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Arthur Bonner on the Ram Jannabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy.

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**Cover transparency:**

Rakesh Sahai





## Tall promises

**T**he cover story portrayed the crisis faced by the National Front government (*The spirit of 1979*, 3-9 June). The Janata Dal which came to power by riding on the crest of the anti-Congress wave, now finds itself caught between the devil and the deep sea. V. P. Singh himself is a media-made personality



**V.P. Singh with Janata Dal leaders: providing no solutions**

who became powerful only because of his promises of forming a 'clean' government. Unfortunately, now he finds himself party to the same evils which came to be associated with Rajiv Gandhi's regime.

After the Janata Dal assumed office last year, there has been an increase in the strife and turmoil in the country. While the situation in Kashmir has deteriorated, there has been an upsurge of violence in Punjab too. The Centre's

indecisiveness and inability to control the violence has led to the loss of a number of precious lives.

V. P. Singh's government has failed in other spheres too. The PM's failure to bring down the prices of essential commodities has led to widespread inflation. Besides, the stigma of Meham will leave a permanent mark on the electoral history of India as well as on the credibility of the National Front government. The PM has betrayed the people of India. He should make an effort to win back the confidence of the people who had voted his government to power.

**Chitra Hariharan, Madras (Tamil Nadu)**

■ One certainly feels let down by the performance of the NF government. The Janata Dal's silence over the 'Meham' issue, inner-party bickering, failure to

check the spiralling prices of essential commodities, and inability to deal with the subversive elements in Punjab and Kashmir have undermined any good work that the government might have done.

**Shalabh Saxena, Ahmedabad (Gujarat)**

■ The rumblings of dissent within the National Front have turned into roars of opposition as Devi Lal has come out in public to combat V. P. Singh. The BJP is sore over the removal of

Jagmohan, while the Janata Dal has soured its relations with the left over the Ayodhya issue. The electorate is wild with V. P. Singh for his inability to check prices. Finally, the Congress(I) is not going to keep silent over the Kashmir issue.

With Pakistan close on our borders, and the Indian Cabinet unable to decide on the next step, the future appears to be bleak for V. P. Singh. Ironically, if he is to survive, he needs the support of the very people who are out to wreck him.

**Vijaya Moorthy, Pune (Maharashtra)**

## Hindi vs English

**T**he declaration of Hindi as the official language of Uttar Pradesh by chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, has been vehemently opposed by Khushwant Singh (*Sending English to Coventry*, 6-12 May). Singh has not viewed the matter in its entirety.

Hindi is the only language that is understood by all in the state. Urdu, though spoken by the Muslims in the state, cannot replace Hindi because all those who speak or read Urdu can also speak or read Hindi but not vice versa. If we have Bengali for West Bengal, Oriya for Orissa, Tamil for Tamil Nadu, Telugu for Andhra Pradesh, why not Hindi for Uttar Pradesh? Declaring Hindi as the state's official language does not lessen the importance of English as the link language. With English as the language of state administration, the masses, who do not speak it, suffer a severe handicap. Language should not be used as an instrument of dominance. The colonial inheritance of English should be discarded.

**Satyadeo Poddar, Agartala (Tripura)**

■ Mulayam Singh Yadav's tirade against English is unwarranted. After all, if his



**Mulayam Singh: anti-English stance**

son can attend an English medium school in the state, why can't the others learn English too? Since so many languages are spoken in India, it is only natural that English will be used as the link language. Also, what happens when Indians go abroad? Do they have to speak in the native tongue with foreigners too?

**Radhika Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

## Back to bragging

**I**t was quite hilarious to find loudmouth Shatrughan Sinha bragging once again (*'I am nobody's private property'*, 27 May-2 June). Does he expect us to really believe that he was

**Shatrughan Sinha: shooting off**





offered the chief ministership of Bihar? What really shocked us was how a man like Amitabh Bachchan could even agree to interview 'Shotgun'.

**Bibhas Basumatary, Kokrajhar (Assam)**

## War is the answer

India may have become a rather dangerous place and things may seem to be slipping out of control due to this unprecedented situation created by extremists, terrorists and secessionists who are not only being actively encouraged by Pakistan but are also being provided with very substantial material support by them both in Punjab and Kashmir (*How of the gun*, 22—28 April). There is, however, no need for us to send wrong signals in panic. At the most, all this may

on any challenge to preserve India's unity, integrity and sovereignty, and reversing any aggression by making a rather good use of their now very well-stocked "dry" powder. On the other hand, this is just going to result in a crushing blow to the Pakistani mite, leading even to Benazir's downfall and years of political instability, thus, ending miserably their dream of waging a thousand years war with India. Under the circumstances, this seems to be the only way out of meeting this sinister challenge by hitting hard at the basic source and reservoir of all our troubles.

**S V Jaswal, New Delhi**

## Denial

We are surprised to find the repetition of a baseless allegation about PLA training camps in



**Anti-India graffiti in Srinagar: aided by Pakistan?**

culminate in yet another bloody war with our hostile neighbour.

It does not matter much that Pakistan has considerably beefed up its forces with impressive strike reserves and that its forces trained on Kashmir should not be taken so lightly because, in the meantime, our armed forces, too, have taken a definite jump in our defence capabilities and are now well-equipped, quite capable and, indeed, willing to take

Bangladesh in your report *Sudden death*, 3—9 June. It is unfortunate that this baseless allegation against Bangladesh has again appeared in your weekly despite our denial in this regard before. We have categorically made it clear time and again that there is no training camp for any insurgent group including the so-called PLA, anywhere in Bangladesh.

**A. Q. S. Dewan, first secretary (Press), Bangladesh deputy high commission, Calcutta (West Bengal)**



**On the sets of Mahabharat: good team work**

## Laudable effort

Your feature on B R Chopra's *Mahabharat* (*End of an epic*, 20—26 May), was interesting. However, I do not agree with Iqbal Masud's comment that *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* began a process of "thrusting religion down our throats". *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* are two glorious epics that have come down to us through the ages. They teach us the values of friendship, love, brotherhood and patriotism. If Ramanand Sagar and B R Chopra have made certain changes in their respective serials, they can hardly be faulted. After all, compressing voluminous epics and presenting them on screen is no mean task.

**Shyama Desai, New Delhi**

## Power-hungry

The role played by the legislators in bringing down the Congress government in Nagaland was deplorable (*The toppling game*, 27 May—2 June). Frequent changes in the government retard the progress of a state. In order to check dissidence, these legislators will no doubt be given positions in the new government. In the long run, the state will be looked after by men who do not

have the interests of the government at heart, but are keen to grab power by hook or by crook.

**R.N. Vaswani, Bombay (Maharashtra)**

## Omission

Your magazine needs to be congratulated for the story on Ilaiyaraaja (*Note-worthy*, 27 May—2 June). Undoubtedly he is one of the best music directors that India has produced. What the article failed to mention is that his *How To Name It* is included in the syllabus of London's prestigious Music University and that his *Nothing But Wind* sold out and even competed with Michael Jackson's *Bad*.

**C. Ravi Shankar, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)**

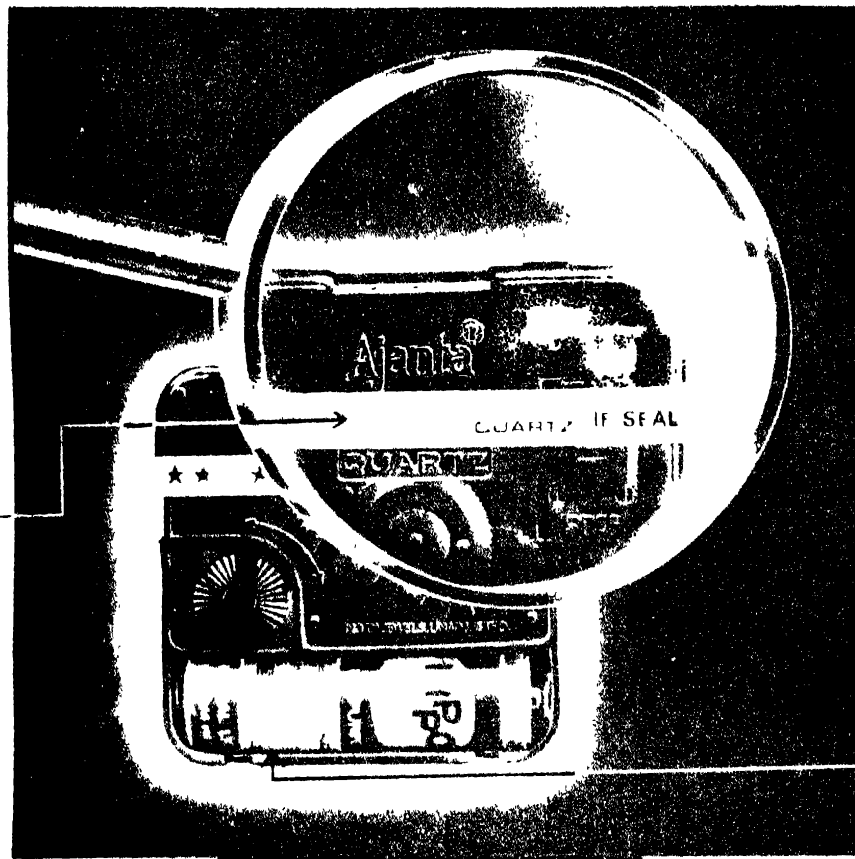
**Ilaiyaraaja: one of the best**





# CHECK

1) Ajanta brand name moulded on the movement (while imitators use stickers)

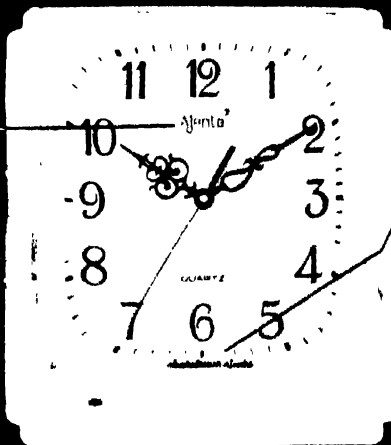


2) Battery Cell having the Ajanta brand name printed on it.

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3) Ajanta brand name moulded on dial (while imitators use stickers)

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4) Ajanta INDIA Ajanta are moulded on lower side of the dial just below the digit '6'

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# Hand of the Potter



I have in hand what must be India's first journal for homosexuals—gays and lesbians Vol I No 1 of *Bombay Dost* has 18 pages, half in English, half in Hindi and is priced at Rs 5. It is for private circulation only and gives neither the name of the editor-cum-publisher nor its address. I expect this is to save itself from being harassed by the police.

Personally I have absolutely nothing against homosexuality as I regard it as natural as bi-sexuality. Some people are born that way, it also exists in the animal world. Omar Khayyam was right in his judgement on the Divine Potter who moulded us from lumps of clay.

One answered this, but after silence spake

A vessel of a more ungainly make,  
"They sneer at me for leaning all awry,

What! did the hand then of the Potter shake?"

You will have noticed that homosexuals often have ungainly shapes and their exaggerated gestures betray their sexual inclinations.

There is a lot of confusion in the minds of people over the division of sexes. Most regard the line dividing males from females as sharp and clear, the incidence of hermaphroditism as an aberration of nature, effeminacy in men, masculinity in women as unnatural deviations. None of these assumptions are correct. As a matter of fact, there is no such clear black and white divide between the sexes as males and females have masculine and feminine characteristics of different proportions in them, there is something of the woman in every man and something of the man in every woman. These traits surface at different times and in different circumstances in their lives. Hardly any one goes through life without some homosexual experience or the other. Boys are exposed to it at school and college. Girls have crushes on their teachers or on each other during their adolescence. In purely male or female institutions like jails, ashrams, convents, monasteries, and the army, homosexuality is rampant.

The vast majority of men and women grow out of it. A small minority continue to have homosexual or lesbian relationships because they find them more emotionally fulfilling. For some reason their incidence is higher amongst sensitive creative people like artists, musicians, dancers etc than the ordinary run of humanity. These liaisons can be intensely marked with violent jealousies and may be life-long. What confuses the sexual scene further is the fact that many of them are heterosexual. Thus we have people like Oscar Wilde who was for a time a devoted husband and father as well as a pederast. We had our own Amrita Shergil who had numerous affairs with men as well as women and died as a married woman. We also had the celebrated nuclear physicist, Dr Homi Bhabha who, like many homosexuals, had a life-long attachment to an elderly female. Also the eminent writer Aubrey Menon who had a permanent male lover but continued to solicit other men till the last days of his life. I know many celebrities of today who are likewise ambidextrous for obvious reasons. I cannot name them. I have both respect and admiration for some of them.



**India's first journal for homosexuals, *Bombay Dost*, goes beyond being a forum of affirmation of homosexuality. It provides information about where you can find others similarly inclined**

Do homosexuals need to have a journal of their own? *Bombay Dost* goes beyond being a forum of affirmation of homosexuality. It provides information about where you can find others similarly inclined. In Bombay you may meet them in the evening at the Gateway of India. In Delhi in the new Coffee House. Signals for recognition are provided by the colour of shirts you may wear, by a rose placed on the table where you may sit with others of the ilk. In the West they wear one ear-ring in the right ear. I find this a somewhat crude form of soliciting. I have also personal objection to the Hindi word for gay. It is *khush* and the fraternity described as *khushuists*. I repeat that although I have absolutely nothing against them, I wish they would choose a name which bears no resemblance to mine. I am not one of them.

## Family problem

Two men met at a bar and struck up a conversation. After a while one of them said "You think you have family problems? Listen to my situation. A few years ago I met a young widow with a grown-up daughter and we got married. Later my father married my stepdaughter. That made my stepdaughter my stepmother and my father became my stepson. Also my wife became mother-in-law of her father-in-law. Then the daughter of my wife, my stepmother, had a son. This boy was my halfbrother because he was my father's son, but he was also the son of my wife's daughter which made him my wife's grandson. That made me the grandfather of my halfbrother. This was nothing until my wife and I had a son. Now the sister of my son, my mother-in-law, is also the grandmother. This makes my father the brother-in-law of my child, whose stepsister is my father's wife. I am my stepmother's brother-in-law, my wife is her own child's aunt, my son is my father's nephew and I am my own grandfather and you think you have family problems!"

(From Osho Rajneesh, contributed by Atul Kumar, Sahibabad) ●



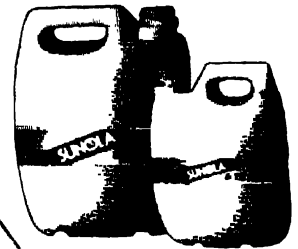
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R.K. LAXMAN/THE TIMES OF INDIA



■ If there can be a ceiling on farmers' lands worth a few thousand rupees, why should there be no ceiling on urban property worth scores of rupees?

**Dev Lal**, deputy prime minister

■ Eighty million people of India would shed their last drop of blood to defend every inch of Kashmir from the outside world. How can we afford to lose it?

■ I am not against the idea of a national government, provided it is based on a national consensus.

**V.P. SINGH**, Prime Minister

■ It is not a question of bloodshed or a bloodbath. Such a step is bound to create ill-will in society...I leave it to the government to see how this particular challenge can be met and the controversy resolved.

**SYED SHAHABUDDIN**, Babri Masjid Coordination Committee chairman, on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's decision to go ahead with the construction of the Ram temple

■ I think the CPI(M) does not believe in five day tests. For them the election is a one-day match. They do not work hard continuously. Rather, they go in for

intensive rigging only on the day of polling.

**M.J. AKBAR**, Congress(I) MP and AICC(I) spokesman, on the eve of the municipal polls in Calcutta

■ Politics has become big business. There is rampant corruption and money bags dictate terms...Corruption has become a way of life.

**PRAKASH SINGH BADAL**, Akali Dal president

■ This is our chance of transforming Gujarat. If this project is stalled for any reason, we will be left behind and I will not allow it.

**CHIMANBHAI PATEL**, Gujarat chief minister, on the Narmada project

■ Who said that Pepsi is a world leader in food processing. It is a leader in snack foods and soft drinks, not food processing. So, how come

they are promising to do wonders to our food processing sector.

**RAMESH CHAUHAN**, Parle Ltd chairman

■ The friendship between Rajiv Gandhi and Amitabh Bachchan and my relationship with V.P. Singh are entirely different. The (former) two were friends whereas I am an admirer. Besides, I wasn't interested in grabbing power.

**RAJ BABBAR**, actor





# Petty politics

*Nobody in India seems capable of seeing the larger issues at stake*



The world as seen through Indian newspapers on Thursday, 14 June, seems an incredibly insular and nasty place, preoccupied with its own special trivialities. Om Prakash Chautala declares that he "is ready to be CM again" if the nation so desires, defections in Nagaland make the government totter, microphones are flung at the first public meeting Rajiv Gandhi addresses on his second-class Bharat Yatra, the well-fed Farooq Abdullah laments from the safety of Essex that in his home state "the poor have reached a point of starvation", Ramakrishna Hegde is scheduled to explain later in the day why he tapped telephones in Karnataka, the enforcement directorate issues summons to Aitabh Bachchan demanding to know from where he got his Swiss francs, more corruption is revealed at the Bombay High Court; Maneka Gandhi threatens to quit once again, and, new data reveals that India is the fifth-largest polluter in the world. Our cup runneth over? Yes, but what distinguishes our woes from those of other countries is their banality.

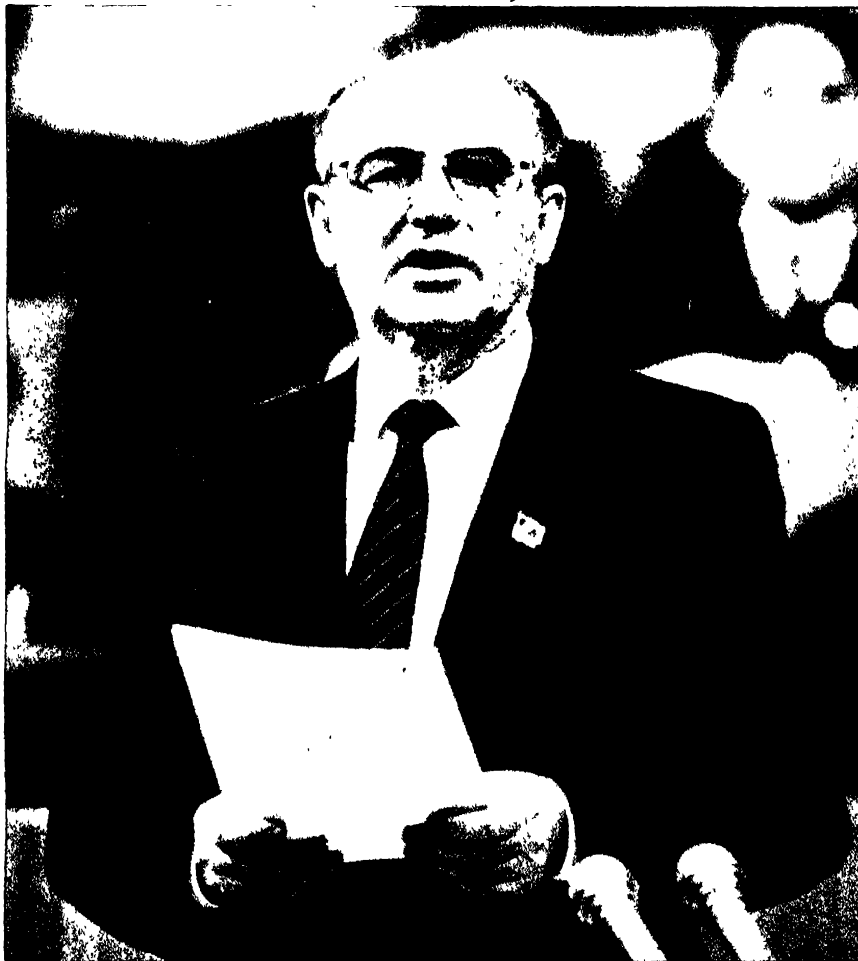
If we could just lift our heads from the self-created morass, we would catch a glimpse of all the thrilling and challenging changes happening around us. A brave new world beckons but, alas, we have neither the time nor the energy to contemplate its exciting dimensions. For us the politics behind Mr Chandra Shekhar's trip to Balia in the august company of Mulayam Singh Yadav is far more interesting.

The man who is working overtime to usher in a new era is as burdened as Atlas. Indeed, he is probably the most harassed man on the globe today. These days he has another problem, he can't sleep. Mikhail Gorbachev told Margaret Thatcher in Moscow

last week, "I don't know what I have to do to get some sleep. I cannot sleep at night. I would like to sleep in the afternoon. I almost fell asleep yesterday at the Warsaw Pact meeting."

Understandably so. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is falling apart. In India we are petrified at the prospect of having two secessionist movements, but in the Soviet Union the whole country wants to secede. The Centre cannot hold because there is no Centre. The Baltic states, the Central Asian republics, the Armenians, the Georgians, the Ukrainians, the Azerbaijanis all want to be 'free'.

**Mikhail Gorbachev: a statesman and a visionary**



by day after tomorrow. Mr Gorbachev has now come up with a fresh formula. Moscow will only have jurisdiction over defence, foreign affairs and "certain financial and economic matters delegated to it by the constituent republics." Every sane man and woman will pray that the formula finds favour with the warring parties.

Given the magnitude of his domestic difficulties, it is a miracle that Gorbachev, in what must surely be the twinkling of an eye, has achieved so much. Doubtless, he himself did not anticipate the speed at which the forces he had unleashed would gather momentum and bring large parts of the world close to bloody anarchy. In the end, however, change was democratic and largely peaceful. Eastern Europe today is nothing like it was this time last year, and despite small daily tremors it will soon settle down, no doubt, to be besieged by all the headaches attendant on universal suffrage.



**M**ikhail Gorbachev's failures are legendary, but so are his successes. Whatever his destiny—the assassin's bullet, exile in Siberia or the title of messiah—he has changed the nature of our world in such a fundamental way that for once it is true to say that things will never be the same again. This change has been so swift and gigantic that one is sometimes frightened to consider its implications. Can we live without the Cold War? Can we live without the Evil Empire? Can we live in a multi-polar rather than a BI-polar world? Can we live without competing ideologies involved in a life-and-death struggle for supremacy? And finally, can we live without conflict?

Once you take away these certitudes, the planet appears to be a very unfamiliar place, almost purposeless. Battle-thirsty generals, manipulative politicians, terrorists, dictators, spies, armament manufacturers, think-tanks and defence institutes become redun-

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe such substitutes are being energetically encouraged with wide-spread approval from the local populace.

Mr Gorbachev is not an imposing man. He has no grand eloquence, no commanding presence, no formidable intellect, no compelling sense of destiny. He is animated by the simplest and most basic of concerns: he wants his people to enjoy a decent standard of living so that no one can ever say again that the Soviet Union is actually "Upper Volta with nuclear weapons". In trying to provide his people with butter he has sacrificed guns.

When one considers the immensity of the Gorbachev achievement and its implications for future generations, one realises what a towering figure he is in world history. All the other 'great' leaders and thinkers of this century, or any century—Lincoln, Churchill, Marx, Mao, to go back no further—seem pygmies by comparison.

tion that these could be discussed either at the ministerial or official level. To reinforce the proposals, a gesture was added: one armoured brigade from a forward area in Rajasthan was withdrawn. So far so good.

The Pakistanis took their time responding—immediately construed as bad faith by Delhi—but finally welcomed the Indian initiative and suggested foreign secretary-level talks immediately, either in New Delhi or in Islamabad, leaving South Block to choose the venue. The caveat that the CBM did not address the central issue—self-determination—was added.

I thought this was a breakthrough, an opportunity to be eagerly seized. If India and Pakistan started discussing Kashmir, the heated temperature in the Valley would be substantially lowered. This would not mean a return to normalcy but the spectacle of the two foreign secretaries engaged in dialogue would be a severe setback for terrorists and secessionists.

Did we accept the invitation? No, we instantly rejected it, putting absurd and impossible pre-conditions. In short, New Delhi sabotaged the talks. What were the pre-conditions? Hand over Amanullah Khan and Wassan Singh Zafarwal (a top Sikh terrorist) to India and stop aiding and abetting Kashmiri separatists. Now, whether there are 31 training camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) or whether the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is involved in stoking the violence in Sind are matters which will not be resolved till doomsday. For myself, I think it is more than likely that RAW is active in Sind. Does anyone in India, including the Prime Minister, know what RAW is up to? So, any holier-than-thou postures are pure humbug. If, for domestic reasons, Benazir Bhutto needs turbulence in the Valley, so does the Vishwa Hindu Parishad harassed Vishwanath Pratap Singh. The difference is that the Pakistanis always take our pants off when it comes to scoring diplomatic points.

All over the world, 'enemies' are sitting down together across the negotiating table. Pushed by Gorbachev, decades-long armed conflict is coming to an end in Angola, Cambodia, Yemen, the Middle-East. Only India and Pakistan live in a world where John Foster Dulles and Joseph Stalin seem to be still alive. •



**For us the politics behind Chandra Shekhar's trip to Ballia in the august company of Mulayam Singh Yadav is far more interesting than the changes sweeping across the globe**

dant. If domination as a norm in international relations is to be jettisoned, what engine will drive individual nations? Peace, after all, is not a natural state as history constantly reminds us. What is? Low-intensity conflict? These, of course, are questions for poets (Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators") and philosophers to wrestle with, but for the moment the pursuit of creature comforts—colour TV sets, Levis, running hot water, toilet paper (chronically in short supply in Russia)—might be a useful substitute. Certainly in the

**B**ut for us in the subcontinent, it is business as usual. Gorbachev does not seem to exist, and if he does it is only to be praised (or denounced if Mr Harkrishen Singh Surjeet is active) at seminars. We pin medals on him, but ignore the example he has set.

Some weeks ago, South Block, under intense pressure from countries as diverse as Canada and Japan, sent to Islamabad what are officially described as 'confidence building measures' (CBM) with the implied sugges-



# MENDING FENCES

*The India-Nepal agreement was a personal triumph for both V.P. Singh and K.P. Bhattarai*

"We have both gained," V.P. Singh when asked which country—India or Nepal—had benefited more from the recent agreement

**T**he "we" could just as easily have referred to Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and himself. For the Raja, the India-Nepal communique—which ought to end the bitterness and suspicion which characterised bilateral relations during the Rajiv-Birendra era—was a godsend. Coming at a time when his government is beset with problems (Kashmir, Punjab, inflation, etc.), the agreement with Nepal was an image-booster—a badly-needed shot in his political arm. More importantly, perhaps, the speed and cordiality with which the accord was reached sent an unmistakable political message: that it was Rajiv's regime which had fouled up relations with Nepal. That in just three days, the present government was able to sort out an unnecessary 14-month-old tangle.

There were political spin-offs in the agreement for Nepal's K.P. Bhattarai as well. His interim government—formed after a plucky struggle with the monarchic order—is still susceptible to threat from anti-democratic forces. With India agreeing to restore the *status quo* which prevailed before the trade and transit treaties lapsed, the ailing Nepalese economy—which is heavily dependent on Indian concessions—is poised to recover. Apart from helping the pro-democratic forces to consolidate politically, economic regeneration will also improve the chances of the various parties that comprise Bhattarai's coalition government at the general elections—which

will be called a year from now. Understandably, Bhattarai's Nepali Congress will be the greatest beneficiary.

At the end of Bhattarai's well-publicised three-day visit to Delhi, the two Prime Ministers agreed that "pending the finalisation of a comprehensive arrangement", the two coun-

tries would restore by 1 July, the *status quo ante* which prevailed in April 1987. Among other things, the agreement obliges India to:

- reopen the 15 (out of a total 17) transit points that were sealed last year following differences between the two governments.
- exempt all primary products from Nepal from customs duty
- and allow unrestricted import, free from customs duty, of all manufactured articles containing 65 per cent or more of Nepalese materials

In turn, Nepal, among other things, promised to

- discontinue the work permit scheme for Indian nationals (Its enforcement was one of the factors responsible for souring relations)
- restore the tariff preferences in favour of Indian goods
- and ensure that tariff concessions accorded to goods from third countries should not hurt Indian exports.

The communique also touches on the prickly issue of security (it was Nepal's purchase of Chinese arms that



ASHOK VAHLE



was largely responsible for the soured relations) The two Prime Ministers agreed that "neither side will allow activities in its territory prejudicial to the security of the other" and that the two countries would consult each other on "defence related matters" which could pose a security threat to either

Clearly, the Indians were every bit as keen to reach an agreement. In matters concerning trade, they did more than just accede to the Nepalese request to restore the *status quo ante*. For instance, the revolving credit facility to Nepal was raised from Rs 25 crores to Rs 35 crores and customs duty was waived for all manufactured goods with a 65 per cent Nepalese component as opposed to the earlier 50 per cent. Says a senior foreign office official "They were delighted that we threw in a little extra."

Keen as it was, New Delhi couldn't resist scoring a point. It insisted that the *status quo ante* would be restored as on April 1987 and not on March 1989, when India had allowed the

**Both Nepal and India tried to make out that if the 'historic agreement' was reached in a mere three days, this owed wholly to the negotiating skills of V.P. Singh and Bhattarai**

trade and transit treaties to expire. The idea was to suggest that it was the actions of the previous Nepalese government which led to the soured relations. India believes that it was from April 1987 onwards that Kathmandu took a number of provocative steps, such as the introduction of work permits for Indians and the purchase of Chinese arms. Bhattarai is believed to have argued for March 1989 as the date, but New Delhi was able to prevail.

New Delhi was also adamant that Nepal remove Indian nationals from the ambit of the work permit scheme. New Delhi has always maintained—and with justification—that the application of the scheme to Indians amounted to a violation of the 1950 India-Nepal treaty, which accords nationals of either country the right to employment in the other. Ministers Sahana Pradhan and Devendra Raj Pandey, who accompanied Bhattarai on the visit, are said to have opposed the Indian demand strongly. But, once again, New Delhi had the last word.

**B**oth Nepal and India tried to make out that if the "historic agreement" was reached in a mere three days, this owed wholly to the negotiating skills and the accommodating attitudes of V.P. Singh and Bhattarai. Says a high-ranking diplomat at the Nepalese embassy "As you know, the two Prime Ministers spent a great deal of time together. Neither really required aides—it was an agreement that was hammered out at the top."

Although Bhattarai and the Raja have their reasons for claiming that the accord was a personal success, there is little doubt that its broad outlines were informally agreed upon before the Nepalese Prime Minister landed in Delhi on 8 June. The Indian position on the restoration of the *status quo ante* had already been discussed with the Nepalese government by high commissioner Lt Gen S.K. Sinha. Bhattarai wasn't risking much when he told Nepali Congress workers in Kathmandu on the eve of his visit: "If I fail to achieve what has been expected, then I will still have something to give to the people—my resignation."

In New Delhi, Bhattarai handled the media, at his joint press conference with V.P. Singh, with skill and confidence. He made it a point to emphasise that the agreement—particularly, the aspects relating to security had not compromised Nepal's status as an independent and sovereign nation. (If stressing this was important, it is largely because a sizeable section of Nepalese political opinion—mainly left—holds that any special security relationship with India is tantamount to undermining Nepal's sovereignty.) He gave no categorical assurance that Nepal would no longer buy weapons from China ("There is no clause in the communiqué which restricts the purchase of arms from third countries") and when asked about the controversial 1988 purchase, said that the army



SANJIV MISHRA

ASHOK VAHIL



(Clockwise from far left) V.P. Singh with K.P. Bhattarai; the signing of the agreement; and the Nepalese PM heads back home: a successful visit





**Bhattarai broke protocol by calling on Chandra Shekhar. "How could I not see our best friend in India?" he is supposed to have said. Shekhar was the only Indian leader who stood by the Nepali Congress right through its struggle**

needed it. Moreover, he added, government files showed that the weapons were the cheapest available. Says Nepal expert Anurudha Gupta, professor at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University: "The Nepali Congress has always suffered at home from being perceived as a child in Indian hands. Bhattarai, who displayed remarkable maturity during his visit, managed to mitigate that perception."

At the same time, the Nepalese Prime Minister was at pains to set Indian fears at rest. He made it more than clear that Nepal recognises and respects Indian security concerns and said that Nepal would always prefer to buy Indian arms given that the price and quality were acceptable. Says a foreign office official: "As far as we are concerned, the fact that Mr Bhattarai has said that Nepal will do nothing that is prejudicial to our security is enough."

In New Delhi, Bhattarai held meet-



**Bhattarai with the Indian President R. Venkataraman: India is no longer the big bully**

ings with political leaders such as E M S Namboodiripad, L K Advani and Rajiv Gandhi. During his talks with the former Prime Minister, he is said to have sought and received an assurance that the Congress would support the agreement. If he felt the need to do so, it was probably because of the possible repercussion of criticism that India had given too much in return for no concrete promises on security matters. But, in any case, Rajiv could hardly have opposed the agreement even if he had wished to the risk of appearing hostile towards a democratic and friendly government would have been too great.

Bhattarai also broke protocol by calling on the Janata Dal's Chandra Shekhar—the only Indian leader who stood by the Nepali Congress right through its struggle. Apparently, New Delhi advised Bhattarai against doing so, but the Prime Minister was adamant. "How could I not see our best friend in India?" he is supposed to have said.

**A**lthough such an agreement has been on the cards since the victory of the democratic forces in Nepal, it is apparent that New Delhi preferred to avoid rushing into one. Bhattarai's government, after all, was sworn in as early as mid-April and, since then, has been repeatedly calling for the restoration of the *status quo ante*. If New Delhi preferred to wait, it is partly because his government appeared weak and unstable for a while. Soon after he was sworn in, a violent police revolt—backed by some members of the previous regime—led to talk of a possible coup and forced Bhattarai to threaten to resign. It was only in the middle of March that the government was able to restore normalcy to the Kathmandu valley.

There was also the question of the Constitutional Recommendation Commission (CRC)—which was created by a royal diktat—to be considered. (The suggestions of the commission, which is vested with the responsibility of recommending changes in the Nepalese Constitution before general elections are held, are crucial to the establishment of a new democratic political order.) When King Birendra announced the composition of the commission last month, there were suspicions that the creation of the CRC was a ploy to buy time and retain political power. Bhattarai's government had to apply a considerable amount of pressure to have the commission's chairman replaced. Says a



foreign office official. "The disbanding of the previous commission was a significant victory. Although, we were always prepared to negotiate with Bhattarai's interim government, we couldn't have afforded to ignore the political situation in Nepal altogether."

At the same time, the delay may

also have been caused by India's insistence that bilateral problems should be sorted out in their entirety—which really meant that any agreement on trade and transit must also include an understanding about security matters. This was difficult for Bhattarai to accept, given the sentiments of his leftist coalition partners.

## THE AGREEMENT

### INDIA



#### PROMISED TO:

- Restore the 22 border points for movement of goods between India and Nepal.
- Reopen the 15 transit points that were closed down last year.
- Increase the standby credit facility to Nepal from Rs 25 crores to Rs 35 crores.
- Exempt the import of all primary products from customs duty.
- Waive customs duty on all manufactured articles with a 65 per cent Nepalese component as against the earlier 50 per cent.
- Resume the canalised exports of petroleum products.

### NEPAL



#### PROMISED TO:

- Not enforce the work permit scheme for Indian nationals.
- Waive the additional customs duty levied on Indian goods.
- Ensure that tariff preferences accorded to goods from third countries are not detrimental to Indian exports.
- Exempt primary products from India from basic customs duty.
- Treat Indian teachers in Nepal's schools on the same footing as Nepalese teachers.

### BOTH



#### PROMISED TO:

- Respect each other's security concerns.
- Refrain from allowing activities in their territories that are prejudicial to the other.
- Consult each other, with a view to reaching an agreement, on defence related matters which pose a threat to each other's security.

In the end, what was worked out appears to be something of a compromise. While there was no "comprehensive agreement" (as India had desired), the joint communique, nevertheless, touches on the security question, if only in a general way. Moreover, the communique also states that the various steps being taken to restore the *status quo ante* are "pending the finalisation of a comprehensive arrangement covering all aspects of bilateral relations."

Whether New Delhi really expects such an "arrangement" to come into effect is not clear. But South Block maintains that it is foolish to have expected Bhattarai to make concrete assurances such as stopping all arms purchases from China. Says an official: "He has signed a communique which states that neither India nor Nepal will do anything to prejudice the security of the other. What more could one want?"

Perhaps, nothing more. But, in retrospect, the present government must consider itself somewhat lucky. In March this year, a month before King Birendra acceded to the demand for a multi-party system, an Indian delegation visited Kathmandu at foreign minister I K Gujral's insistence, with a draft of proposals on trade, transit, etc. The team left New Delhi against the wishes of the Nepali Congress (which felt that a deal with the previous regime would undermine the pro-democracy movement that had gained momentum by then) and, apparently, also against the advice of the foreign office. While Gujral may perhaps be forgiven for wanting to sort matters out quickly and for believing that the movement would take far longer to succeed, it is probable that an agreement then would have seriously harmed India-Nepal relations. Had the proposals been accepted, then the present Nepalese regime would have had good reason to entertain misgivings about India.

But, as it were, all's well that ends well. With the agreement, the foreign office achieved a major diplomatic success, the Raja had his moment in the limelight and Bhattarai's hands were strengthened. More importantly, perhaps, the people of Nepal—who have suffered considerably ever since the trade and transit treaties were allowed to lapse—can look towards a brighter economic future. This is one agreement they should be grateful for. •

Mukund Padmanabhan/New Delhi



# ENIGMA

*Arun Nehru springs a few surprises*

**T**here have always been two sides to Arun Nehru. By common consent, he is an extremely able administrator. As minister for energy in 1985, he got electricity generation shooting up to record levels and later, as minister for internal security (till the autumn of 1986), he assumed so assured a grip on the law enforcement machinery that his rivals feared that he could become a Beria.

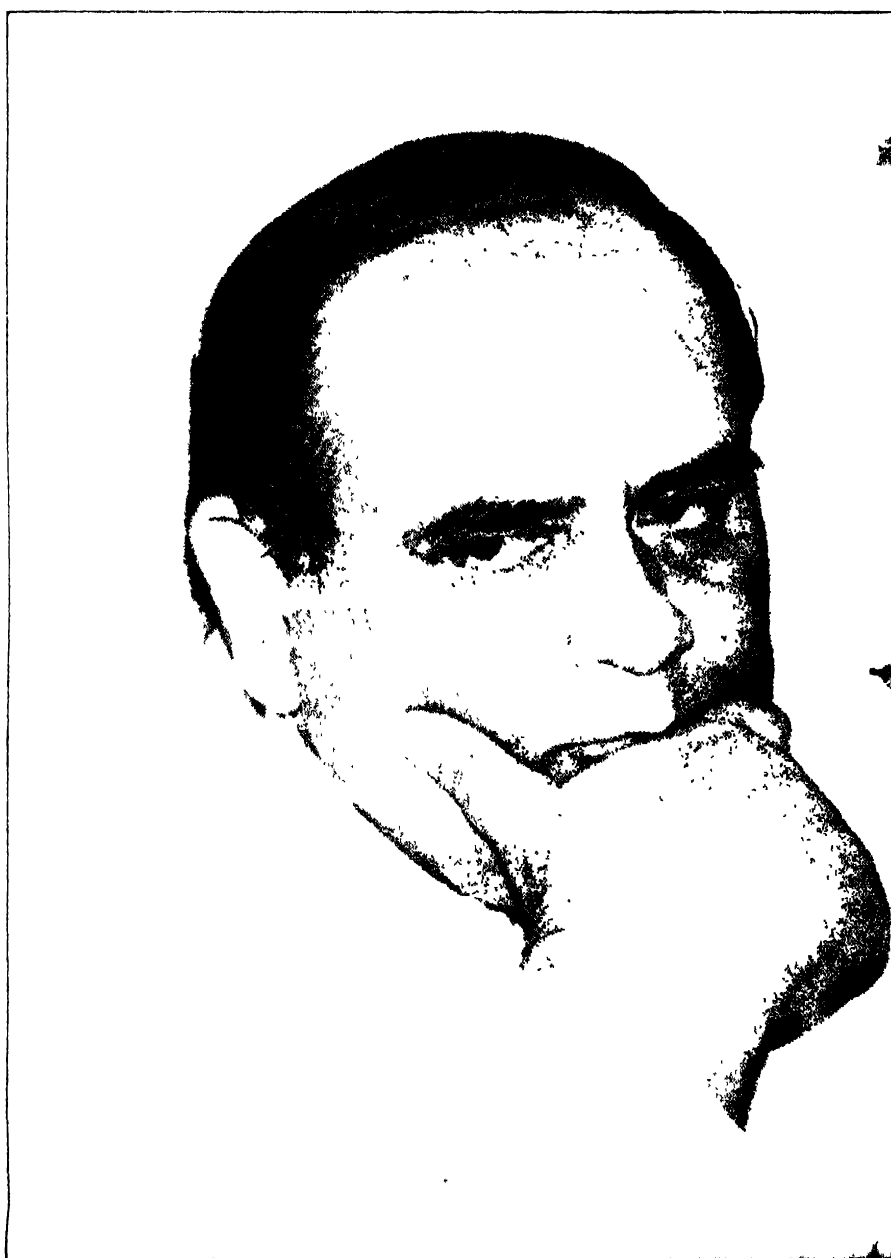
But it is the other aspect of Nehru's skills that provokes the most interest. Recent history demonstrates that he is the master-strategist of Indian politics. In 1984, he pushed Giani Zail Singh into swearing Rajiv Gandhi in as Prime Minister at a time when the nation was still numb after Indira Gandhi's assassination. In 1986, Rajiv dropped him from the government and soon after that, the Congress(I) government's political problems began. In Opposition, Nehru masterminded the rise of Vishwanath Pratap Singh, evolved the tactics that led to the National Front's victory and—on some accounts—formulated the somewhat devious strategy that allowed the Raja of Manda to outwit Chandra Shekhar in the leadership elections.

Through it all, Nehru has kept a low personal profile. Requests for interviews are routinely turned down and when a journalist does manage to corner him, he is laconic and uncommunicative, if not downright hostile.

His role, he seems to believe, is that of the archetypal backroom boy.

**O**ver the last six months, the two sides of Nehru's personality seem to have been emitting contradictory signals.

At one level, Nehru is the most efficient minister in the V P Singh government and still, the hardwork-





g, able administrator of legend. At the commerce ministry, he insists that files are cleared within 24 hours, that no briefing paper is longer than a page and a half and that red tape is shorn to the bare minimum.

He is the only Cabinet minister to have recognised that India could soon become an irrelevance in the post-*perestroika* world unless it adapts. And while the Prime Minister still talks about ceilings on personal wealth and his deputy sings the glories of the rich farmer, Nehru is pursuing his own pragmatic economic policy.

In a sense, it is almost as if the Rajiv revolution of 1985-86 never failed and

liberalisation is still the key item on the economic agenda. Nehru's priorities seem to owe more to his last stint in government than to the loan-waiving socialism of the Janata Dal. Along with Ajit Singh at industry and Arif Mohammad Khan at civil aviation and energy, he is pushing for liberalisation and more competition at a pace which unnerves many of his pinker colleagues.

At a time when the country is obsessed with other issues, he remains convinced that this government's survival depends entirely on its ability to deliver on its economic platform, chiefly on whether it can keep prices down.

NITIN RAI

**Because Nehru meets Rajiv, it does not follow that he is in the process of switching sides and rejoining the Congress(I). But it is easy to see why it should be interpreted as such**

**B**ut it is the other aspect of Nehru's personality that has provoked the most curiosity over the last few months, the master-strategist seems to have gone into hibernation.

Shortly after the National Front government took office, it was believed that Nehru would emerge as one of its key figures, as its chief tactician; and even as the power behind the throne.

In fact, his behaviour has belied those expectations.

- He has spent much of his time abroad. He has been to South Korea, Brazil, Russia, England, West Germany and Kenya among other countries. All the trips were work-related, but the feeling persists that he is looking for excuses to be out of the country.

- Contrary to expectations, Nehru has not involved himself fully in the formation of Kashmir policy. Because he had close links with both Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Jagmohan, it was believed that he would be the architect of the government's strategy. And while he seems to support the Jagmohan line, the Mufti is now closer to V P. Singh than he is to Nehru.

- Nehru has stubbornly refused to function as V P. Singh's strategist in the Dal's internecine battles. Though Devi Lal has abused him, he has refused to be provoked or to assist the Raja in his war with the Tau. Instead, he has kept to himself.

- Privately, he has made it clear that he thinks the government is barking up the wrong tree. He does not believe that a policy of trumpeting the 'sins' of the last government and of bragging about 'managing contradictions' will work.

He believes the country voted for strong and effective governance and is distancing himself from a regime that has failed to provide it.

**A**ll of this has led to speculation that while the media are concentrating on Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar, the real threat to the government's image comes from Arun Nehru. Were he to go public with his reservations, then his criticism would probably damage V.P. Singh far more than Shekhar's carping or the Tau's abuses.

The point, of course, is that Nehru will not do that. Even after he fell out with Rajiv, after he was dropped from the Cabinet and languished in humiliating obscurity, he refused to speak



out or be critical of his cousin. It was not till 1988 that he finally went public with his point of view. This time around, as a member of the government, he is bound by the convention of Cabinet responsibility and has to be even more guarded in his utterances.

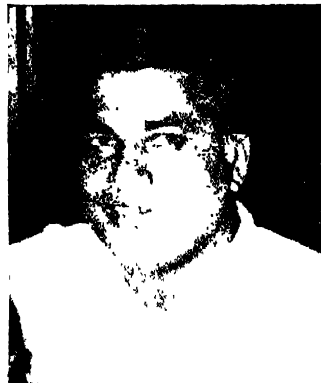
In the light of this, the interview that appears in this issue of SUNDAY—his first major media encounter since he was sworn in as commerce minister—represents an astonishing break

79 demonstrated

- He feels that the government needs to take hard decisions across the board (including making the public sector yield a greater return) if it is to control prices—which it has not done.
- He thinks that, perhaps, the Janata Dal is overestimating its own strength. As he says, the Congress lost the 1989 election but it was not routed. In fact, he points out, it did better in the south than the Dal did in the north.

That pronouncement is significant in the light of persistent rumours that the two cousins have been in touch. Neither has spoken at length to the media since the last election, so the reports have been impossible to confirm.

Now, Nehru authenticates the rumours. Of course, he's been in touch with Rajiv, he says. They've met several times. Why shouldn't they have?



**Suppose Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammad Khan and Ajit Singh crossed over to resume the Rajiv revolution and reawaken the spirit of 1985, could V.P. Singh still survive? Nehru categorically denies such a scenario. But what if it came about?**

He goes on to add that he meets people from all areas of the political spectrum and defends his accessibility on the grounds of political maturity. But the message is clear: not only has he re-established contact with his cousin, but he sees no reason to lie about it.

**B**ecause Nehru meets Rajiv, it does not follow that he is in the process of switching sides and rejoining the Congress(I). But it is easy to see why it should be interpreted as such. Consider also the impact on V.P. Singh's regime if, a few months from today, with inflation raging out of control,

with type. While he is careful to say nothing that does not befit his status as a member of the government, he manages to suggest, nevertheless, that he disagrees with many of V.P. Singh's policies.

- He seems to think that Jagmohan did a good job and that the decision to replace him was misconceived.
- He thinks India needs to liberalise faster than ever before and that those in government who think he is moving too fast need to see what is happening in the world to realise how pressing the issue is.
- He believes that the government is making a mistake by concentrating on filing FIRs because:
  - a) The election was not won or lost on the corruption issue.
  - b) That any government has to 'deliver' and that by focusing on the past, the regime is ignoring the present and the future.
  - c) And that anyway, persecution is always counter-productive as Janata's experience with Mrs Gandhi in 1977-

Such statements coming from a man who was once the Raja's Chanakya are nothing short of astonishing. And they suggest that V.P. Singh cannot afford to take Nehru's support for granted.

**T**he section of the interview that will evoke the most comment, however, has to do not with the failings of this government, but with the relationship between the two cousins, Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Nehru.

After they fell out in 1986, the bitterness ran deep. In 1989, Nehru told SUNDAY that he thought Rajiv was weak and naive. Rajiv retaliated, also to SUNDAY, by challenging Nehru to "win an election from anywhere" in India. The differences seemed irreconcilable.

But now, in mid-1990, the cousins seem to have finally buried the hatchet. As Nehru says, the Janata Dal/National Front won and the Congress(I) lost, so the slate is now wiped clean: he bears Rajiv no ill-will.

Kashmir in flames, Punjab on the boil and the FIRs yielding no 'smoking gun' linking Rajiv to any corrupt deal, Nehru suddenly made an announcement.

Suppose he said that he was convinced that the Janata Dal government was inept and could not confront India's problems. On the other hand, Rajiv had now learned from his mistakes and was, once again, the shiny-eyed 'good guy' of 1985. So Nehru, Arif and Ajit Singh were crossing over to resume the Rajiv revolution and to reawaken the spirit of 1985.

Such an announcement would strengthen Rajiv's hands and consign the Raja to the tender mercies of Shekhar and the Tau—because there would be no other factions left in Delhi. Could V.P. Singh still survive?

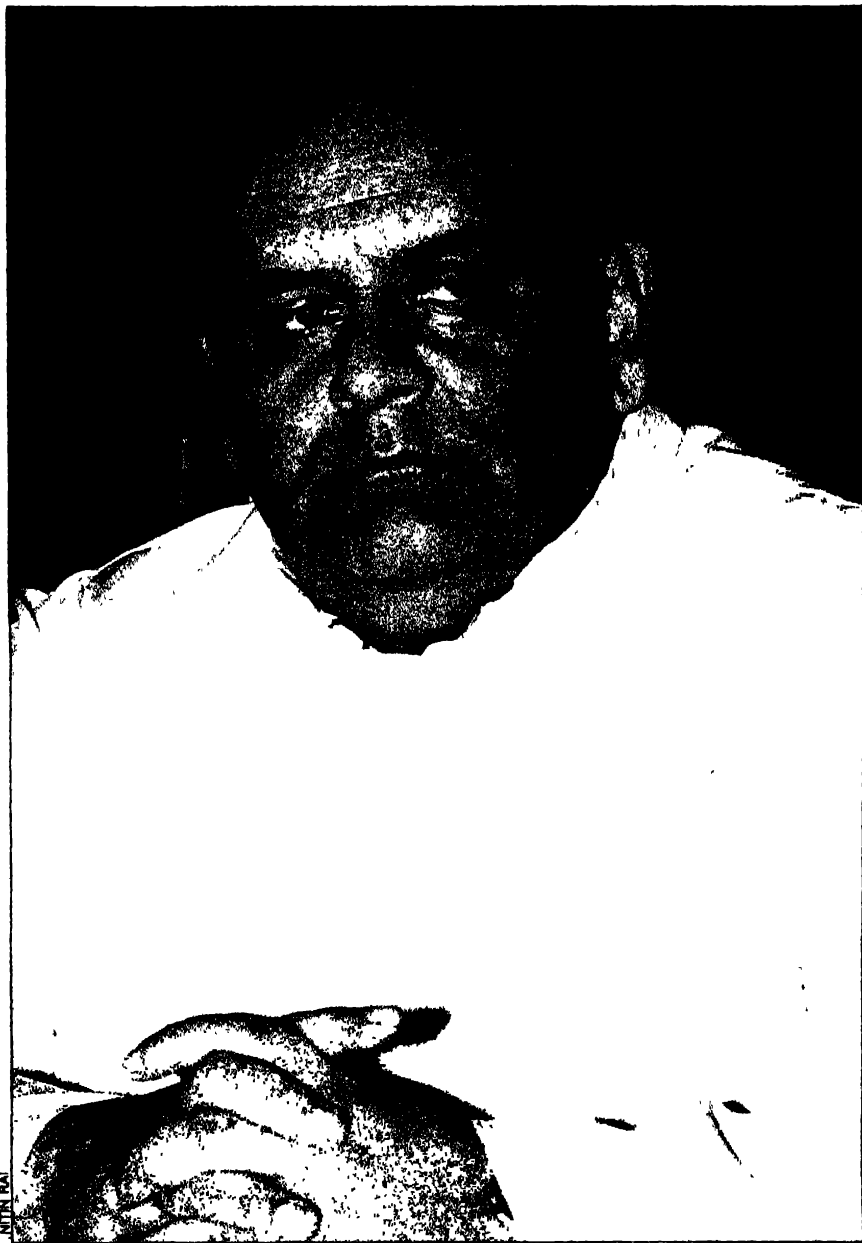
It's still a far-fetched scenario. Nehru categorically denies that realignments are in the offing.

But what if it came about? •

**Vir Sanghvi/New Delhi**



# "OF COURSE, I AM IN TOUCH WITH RAJIV GANDHI"



*Arun Nehru breaks  
his silence*

## THE GOVERNMENT/INFLATION

**SUNDAY:** How do you assess the performance of the government?

**Arun Nehru:** Well, I think one has to look at it from the viewpoint that you've had a general election, you've had a change of government and it's now nearly six months. I think the government has done reasonably well. It is a coalition government. People in India are very used to strong majorities and it has taken some getting used to the concept of a National Front government.

We are a group of 142 MPs. We have 88 in BJP who are supporting us. And also the left who have, I think, 56. So it is now a government with a strong majority, but I think the whole concept of a more tolerant system is one that everyone is progressively getting used to. And one has to look at it philosophically. You can't impose your will because you have no majority. You have to discuss every issue. And you may not necessarily agree with everything, but you have to take the other viewpoint along also.

Very often, people ask us about the contradictions of the left and the right and we respond that differing viewpoints are not dissenting viewpoints. They may delay the decision, but you have to take everyone with you.



**Q: In which areas do you think the government is most vulnerable?**

**A:** Worldwide, the trend is that economic issues predominate and if you look at all the changes happening all around us—there are, of course, system changes, political changes—but the basis of them all is economic.

I think we should be most concerned about rising prices. Not just in India: it is going to be a worldwide problem. As far as this government is concerned, I think rising prices is going to be a very major issue.

**Q: Do you think that is the single biggest problem facing the government?**

**A:** Yes. I would say yes. The government has been in office for six months and the fact is that you are at the end of the traditional honeymoon period.

When you get down to ground realities, people are most interested in their day-to-day living. And the two most important things there are the law and order situation as it affects people personally. And how you balance your budget at home.

We have a very large, emerging middle class and inflation is going to be the big issue.

**Q: Why has the government failed to control prices?**

**A:** I wouldn't say we've failed. The point is that it is not something that has got a simplistic answer. If you look at the last three or four years, every year you've had a deficit of Rs 10,000-Rs 15,000 crores. What you've really done is you've borrowed money and spent it. The result is your foreign debt is up from 26 billion to 56 billion.

If you hadn't spent these 10-15 thousand crores but had used them for investment, you'd have had a very different impact on prices. You can use the money you've borrowed for two or three years to supply goods and services, but finally you've got to face the music. And if you resort to printing more money, you fuel inflation.

Our priority now has to be to cut expenditure. You have to bring the reality in front of people and you've got to act. They are not easy decisions, but you have to take them.

There is no escape from that. Because if you don't act, then you are going to have inflation—as we are having at the moment—and prices will rise even further in the future.

You can't keep having heavy deficits, printing more money and living beyond your means.

And I think the government has a



**Q: What is the biggest problem facing the government?**

**A: Yes, I would say yes. The government has been in office for six months and the fact is that you are at the end of the traditional honeymoon period.**

great responsibility because, after all, the largest spender is the government. That is what we in the ministry of commerce are articulating very clearly. You've got to tighten your belts. You've got to increase exports. You've got to limit imports.

## COMMERCE MINISTRY

**Q: You've been commerce minister for six months now. Of the things you've done, what are you proudest of?**

**A:** That we've got people to be conscious of how essential it is to increase exports. And we've tried to communicate that the commerce ministry is there to help and assist people, not to regulate things.

I would say that in these six months, the work of the commerce ministry must have come down by 25 per cent. And we intend to reduce it by another 25 per cent. I'm quite open about this.

There's enough ingenuity in the Indian mind. You make it worthwhile

and people will export. Why shouldn't they?

**Q: And what is your biggest regret?**

**A:** Not enough time, I think (*laughs*). There's an enormous amount to do and everyone's expecting us to deliver.

It's a very complicated subject and there's a lot to learn. We even had a policy on the export of peacock feathers! (*Laughs*.)

We have very unusual systems in this ministry. We don't have any meetings beyond 15 minutes. It's not necessary. We have a 24-hour clearance system. Nothing is left pending for longer than that. And I don't take any briefings whether it is a consultative committee meeting or a parliamentary question. If you are running the ministry, you should know these things. I just ask them to give a note and that's how I educate myself.

**Q: Is that very different from a briefing?**





## THE ARUN NEHRU INTERVIEW

**Q: Do you think you are less overbearing?**

**A:** I don't know about overbearing, but I think I'm a little more tolerant. I tend to hear the other person's point of view more before taking a decision. After all, we are all human. You could be wrong, the other guy could be right.

But once people understand what you want, then you get it. Everybody in the ministry knows that I don't like a brief that's beyond a page or a page and a half long, regardless of the subject. I get it.

People say that it's extremely important to do certain things. I say it's important *not* to do certain things to conserve time. That's how you have the time to deliver.

## KASHMIR/PUNJAB

**Q: Let's move on to Kashmir. Was Jagmohan your man?**

**A:** You know it's very wrong to term somebody as somebody's man. This is the whole sycophantic, feudalistic system of the retainers and *mai-baaps*. I find it unbearable. The fact of the matter is that everything the government does may not necessarily be right. The cumulative wisdom of India does not lie in the Cabinet. We are people who can make mistakes. And we do make mistakes.

When you select somebody for a particular assignment, you are not selecting him because he is A, B or C's man. You select him because you think he is the best person for the job.

I think Jagmohan did a very good job while he was there.

**Q: So why was he ousted?**

**A:** There's no question of ouster. He is now a member of the Rajya Sabha.

**Q: Well, he regards it as an ouster. He wasn't happy about being brought back.**

**A:** The government takes decisions, the wisdom of which you can keep debating later on, but as a part of the government, I won't comment on that.

All I'm saying is that it is not easy to pass judgement on a situation like that from Delhi. The person who has to take the decision is the man on the spot.

**A:** Yes, because if you are given a briefing, you just repeat what you've been told before the meeting. But if you read a paper, you absorb it. You do that for three months and you are on reasonable ground.

And if you can master all this, then you can really help people. And, after all, everybody needs encouragement.

**Q: That doesn't sound like the Arun Nehru we know! Do you think that your years in Opposition have mellowed you?**

**A:** No, I don't think so. But staying in the Opposition for three or four years is like staying 20 years in power.

**Q: In what way?**

**A:** You learn to appreciate the system more. You look at the other side of things. You become a more tolerant person. I had never seen the other side before.

It is an excellent learning process. I'd recommend it to everyone (smiles).

You know anybody who has gone through this experience will never do something at somebody's bidding just because he was superior. You learn to use your better judgement. Clinging to office becomes less important. You realise that you have to deliver.

**Q: I'll be a little rude. The last time around you had a reputation as a bully. You don't have that now. So have you changed?**

**A:** It's possible. You know when one has to be impatient to get things done because basically you are cutting across a very entrenched system.

But at the same time, I think I've realised that there are some very fine people in government. The point is that you've got to create an atmosphere that allows them to function.

I'll give you an instance. For pre-shipment inspections, we used to have 26 forms. Now we have two forms. The same people who designed 26 forms have designed the two. It depends on how you handle the people.



# INDIA AND THE WORLD

**Q: Is it going to be easy for India to fit into the post-Berlin Wall world?**

**A:** I see it as a great opportunity. What are the changes? One, you've got Europe integrating by 1992. Then, you've had the disintegration of the old order in Eastern Europe. And you have a worldwide shift from state-run economies to market economies. You have *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. You have the global spread of Japanese investment.

But basically, if you've got to describe in a few words what is going on, it is that we are moving towards a global economic system where controls are progressively going to disappear. Where each country will have a few controls to take care of its domestic problems, but where, by and large, a world trading system will come up. And if you ignore that system, you'll be very isolated in your operations.

What we've tried to do is show that we are also moving away from restrictive trading blocks to a multilateral trading system. We show them our new import policy. We show them our new industrial policy and we show that we are not being restrictive.

What we also say is that India in the last 40 years has a certain standing. We have never defaulted on an agreement. We have set conditions for foreign collaborations, but we've never defaulted on them. We've never defaulted on a foreign loan, which is very creditable.

What we say is that we see that we must open out, we must rationalise, but we must do it at a pace which we can afford. We cannot afford 200 per cent inflation. We are not willing to liberalise overnight and pay a very, very heavy price.

And it's fundamentally different for us. In Eastern Europe, you have certain areas where you have over 400-500 per cent inflation.

But as far as India is concerned, we have many strengths.

**Q: In this context?**

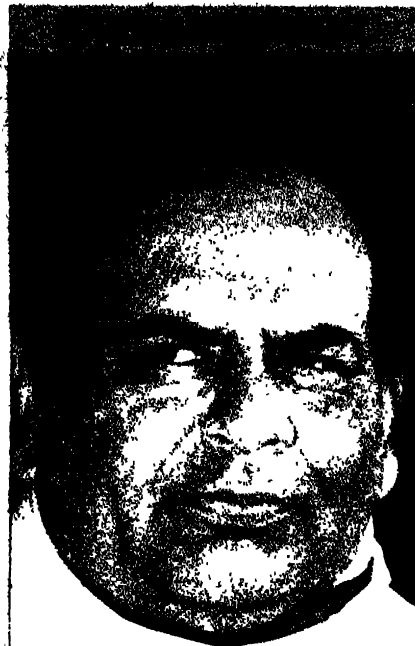
**A:** Yes. Most of our trade is in private hands. We have a thriving small scale sector which is much bigger than you think it is.

We have to change. We have to modernise. We have to keep up with the rest of the world. But this doesn't

## Arun Nehru on the post-perestroika situation

detract from our strengths for the last 50 years.

We have started by liberalising in certain areas. But if you follow what the United States or Europe did over the last 50 years, I don't think our changes are any different. They had to take certain measures to develop their industry and we are doing about the same thing.



**You can't say you won't allow any foreign companies. Nobody is going to allow your companies into his country in that case**

So I don't think India is going to get isolated because we've recognised that the world is changing and we are adapting.

**Q: But do you think we've recognised that the communist system has failed? And that even the Russians are moving towards the market?**

**A:** It depends on how you look at it. People see a lot of weaknesses in the Soviet Union, but we see a lot of strengths as well.

**Q: Really?**

**A:** Well, in the West, the general perception is that there are long queues, there is a recession and industry is collapsing. That's not the way I see it. I think you have to recognise their strengths because of *glasnost*, *perestroika* and the changes that are going on.

They have one-third of the world's raw materials. They have some of the largest plants in the world. Look at the land mass of the Soviet Union. They have a population of 250 million.

What they are really asking themselves is: why should we subsidise? They spend nearly 150 billion dollars on subsidies of various kinds. And what they really want to do is to use that same money to buy technology to improve and upgrade their skills and give a better deal to their people.

The logic of that is irreversible.

Now, as far as India is concerned, they have a tremendous role to play. We have a lot of skills in the small and medium scale sectors. I spent a week in Russia and I saw a lot of commonalities and strengths.

Never mind the long food queues, etc. If you are going to change a system then there is a cost to be paid. The lesson for us is to what they've done to subsidies. Even in India, if you make something of very low quality for one rupee, then even the poorest man will say that he's willing to pay two rupees if he gets better quality.

**Q: Are we as willing as Russia to make dramatic changes?**

**A:** Well, you know in India there are all kinds of opinions and many people think we are ill-equipped to make such a change. We have to look at the situation in Vietnam or China.



Q: Aren't we, in fact, going far too slowly? If you look at South East Asia, it's embarrassing how far behind India is.

A: The problems are different in South East Asia. Population bases are different. Ethnic problems are different. Social problems are different. You have to take those factors into account.

Indonesia has a population of 190 million people and I would admit that it is one of the success stories of the 1980s. In seven or eight years, they have turned their country around.

This is what I always tell everybody to do: look around at the world and see what's happening. We can't live in isolation.

Q: It's beginning to sound as though *perestroika* has passed your colleagues by.

A: Well, every country has to evolve its own response to the changes that are taking place in the world. If you go to Europe, you find that the situations in GDR and Poland, or Hungary and Romania are totally different. Each one is different from the other. People don't realise this because they don't go into the nitty-gritty of things. They go by general impressions.

But the point is that some economies are strong and some are not. And each country is taking its own viewpoint on how to handle the situation.

Similarly in India, we have to decide what suits us. We have to stay in the international community. We have to move towards less restrictive trading but at the same time, we have to see what we are capable of.

If we open up everything tomorrow, we'll go bankrupt overnight.

Q: Is this why we are going slowly?

A: We have to set our own pace. Today, people in India are criticising us for not clamping down on imports. But the fact is that imports and exports are very closely linked together. You can export at will. You need imports.

It's like saying don't allow any foreign companies to come here. But let your companies go all over the world. That sort of theory doesn't work. Nobody is going to let you do it.

Q: Do you think it is going to be easy to attract foreign investment?

A: Well, this is a country of 850 million. Don't forget this is a very enormous figure. And you talk of a population of 250 million. What is the world that you are talking about?

market like that? Look at the buying power. Nobody can ignore you.

What we have to recognise is that in certain sectors we have to allow foreign industry. If you don't invest something, you don't get a return. You don't have funds yourself, so what are you going to do about it?

So you have to invite foreign investment. You have to encourage it.

I'll give you the example of tourism. There are countries from which a lot of tourists come to India: USA, UK, France, Italy, Japan, etc. They want to invest in building their own facilities here so that when their tourists come, they can use those facilities. For instance, the Japanese want to invest on the Buddhist circuit.

What is the harm in letting them make money as long as we make money also? There's no point being



By and large, a world trading system will come up. If you ignore that system, you'll be very isolated in your operations

## THE ANON INTERVIEW

emotional about foreign investment. The world is changing and you don't have money. If you are not pragmatic, you are heading for catastrophe.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

Q: What is your attitude to the public sector—should we make it more efficient or question its *raison d'être*, roll back the frontiers of the state and let the market prevail?

A: Well, I would accept something in between. My thinking is not motivated by any issue except pragmatism. Worldwide the trend is moving in a certain direction. And if you want to exist as part of a global economy—which you have to because you can't live in isolation—then you have to accept the principle that all investment must pay.

Today, the public sector has a social need—nobody denies that. But that social need has a certain cost: it can't be allowed to become a burden. The fact today is that even if you had a return of Rs 5,000 crores on the public sector, it would help you cut down half your deficit. The point is that you are not getting it.

But why aren't you getting it? I don't buy the argument that the public sector can't make profits because there are several units that do make profits. Finally, it is a question of taking hard decisions.

Q: Such as?

A: Well, I've made it very clear that as far as the ministry of commerce is concerned—though most of our public sectors are making money—that where our units are not generating the kind of return we need, we are taking hard decisions. We are even prepared to shut them down. Not because we want to save the money, but because we want to use it better.

We are restructuring STC and MMTC and a lot of other organisations not from the viewpoint of economising or cutting costs, but with a view towards making them more effective.

The issue is not mere profitability. Take ITDC, where we have a Rs 10 crore profit. The point is to compare ITDC with the Taj or the Maratha. The fact is that our profitability does not compare with theirs. So we have to find a method to do that.



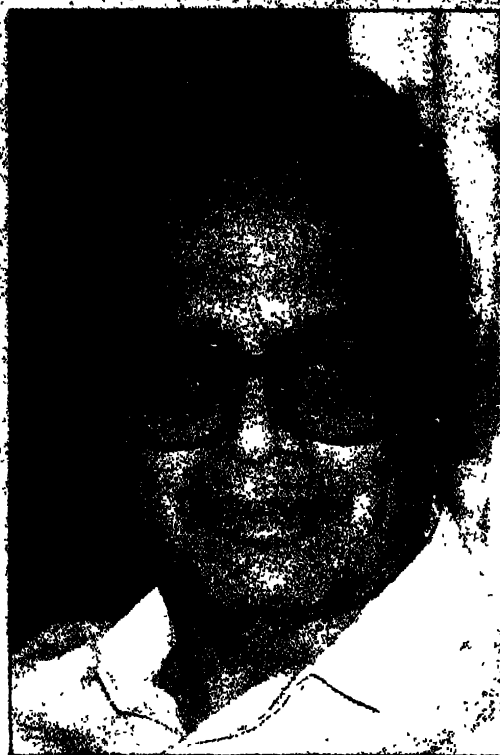
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Q

**Why was Jagmohan removed?**

A

**I think he did a very good job....Everything that we in the Cabinet do may not be right****Q: Is Kashmir any nearer a solution now?**

**A:** There are no simplistic solutions. We are a parliamentary democracy. And whether it is Punjab or Kashmir, political priorities must take precedence over every other matter. The political system has to prevail. Elections have to be held. The point really is, when does the condition arise for that political dialogue? We are committed to the political process, but it is ground realities which will determine when the state is ready for it.

But at the same time, Kashmir, Punjab or any other part of India is not negotiable. We can talk about the politics of the matter, but that does not affect the basic fact that they are a part of India.

We do not negotiate about Khalistan or secession. Those are not issues to be negotiated. There is no question of it.

**Q: Were you really against the Punjab accord?**

**A:** Not in principle. I told Rajiv that we must have an accord. But I felt that an accord could only succeed if the local leadership was totally committed to it. You cannot do an accord if two-thirds are opposed to it. You can't gloss over the cracks and ignore local

ground realities.

When we signed the Punjab accord, I felt that Badal and Tohra had more clout than Barnala and so should have been consulted. But once the accord was signed, we all wanted it to succeed—myself included—and we tried desperately to make sure it went through.

But common sense told me that if two-thirds of the people on the field opposed it, then it wasn't going to work. So, for six months it looked very good. But from the seventh month onwards...

So I didn't oppose the accord. I expressed my views but when the decision was taken, I went along with it.

When it ran into trouble, I was sad. I didn't feel that I had been proved right. The people of Punjab have suffered enormously.

### VINDICTIVENESS/FIRS

**Q:** You talk about 'delivering' a lot, but there is a feeling in the country that your government is less interested in delivering than in filing FIRs and trying to sustain itself on the sins of its predecessors. How do you respond to that?

**A:** (Pause) Well, I don't want to pass

comments on individual subjects, but let's put it like this. We are the government of the day and it is not my style to be critical of the past. We've had a political battle and the people of India have decided who has won and who has lost.

That matter is over.

Now we have to deliver. That's what the people of India expect.

What a couple of people in the ruling political circle believe is not necessarily what the people of India may feel. The people will judge us by what we do. It is not relevant today what the previous government did.

My problem is a shortage of time. I can use the present to deal with either the future or the past. As far as I am concerned, the past is over. It's gone. I prefer to deal with the future.

**Q: So you don't approve of vindictiveness?**

**A:** It's self-defeating. If you allow yourself to be dominated by what somebody did two months ago or two years ago, then you can't really deliver.

In this game, you can't afford to look at things personally. It is not done.

And politically you know, it is nobody's birthright to rule the country.





## THE ARUN NEHRU INTERVIEW

forever. The good thing is we have elections every five years. And I am a great believer in change.

We are a nation of 850 million. The biggest insult to the Indian mind is when people talk of alternatives. You have 30 people in the Cabinet today. They can go tomorrow and another 30 people will come. What difference does it make?

What we should realise is that in a democracy, the people are supreme and they will determine the future. Everyone's dispensable. And that's a good thing.

**Q:** So you don't approve of all these FIRs?

**A:** I'm not going to comment on an individual matter. But as a system, I don't like dwelling on the past.

**Q:** In 1977, your aunt would have been quite content to have left politics. It was probably Janata's prosecution that launched her on her comeback. Are you at all concerned that the same thing might happen with another member of your family?

**A:** I'm not going to generalise. But as far as Mrs Gandhi was concerned, she lost, she accepted the responsibility and she was quite content to let things be.

**Q:** There's no doubt that when Janata prosecuted her, there was an upsurge within the country and within the party and it helped bring her back much faster.

**Q:** Do you think the prosecution is going to be as counter-productive this time?

**A:** A vendetta is always counter-productive. There's no doubt about it. And I have no hesitation in saying it.

Just look back at what happened to us. I don't like to think about it because it's not important, but it didn't do anybody any good. We still won the election. That should be a lesson for us not to follow suit.

Now everybody involved is over 21 and they've got to see this for themselves. But the fact is it never works. And if you are vindictive and you are restrictive and you try and worry people, they always hit back at you.

That fact is that because of the strength of our democratic institutions, you can't fix anyone. You may



**Q:** Which is the biggest problem facing the government?

**A:** Rising prices. As far as the government is concerned, I think rising prices is going to be a very major issue.

think that today you are sitting in power and you can do it, but you can't. You can't do it. It doesn't work.

You can get away with it for one or two days, but the third day, it will come to you. It's stupid.

I say this quite openly. I feel that the people have elected us. If you want to use the present time for the future, then fine. Otherwise (*shrugs*)...

**Q:** You say that you oppose the FIRs because you don't want to be vindictive. But, let's face it, your critics within this government say there is another reason: you are just terrified that your name is going to crop up in one of the investigations.

**A:** (*Laughs*) They can take my power of attorney for the past, present and future. They can go to Switzerland or wherever they want and check up anything they want to.

I have nothing to hide.

### BOFORS/HDW/AIRBUS

**Q:** One view is that because the government has spent so much time on the investigations, it will end up being judged by whether it returns with proof of the Congress(I)'s involvement in corruption. It will not be judged on

its own performance. You think that tactically this is a mistake?

**A:** All these questions about Bofors, HDW, Airbus and all that, they are a different thing altogether. I don't believe that the election was won or lost on these issues at all.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** Yes, I don't think they were that important. If you analyse the general election, you find that the Congress was defeated, but it was *not* routed. Look at it practically. We won the northern states and the BJP also won sizeably. The Left Front lost ground in Kerala, but gained in Bengal. And the Congress carried the south.

If you take the view that it was this issue—Bofors, HDW or whatever—then it shouldn't have happened that way. It should have been national.

The Congress swept the south. That's the correct word. They swept the south much more than we won the north.

So I don't think one should arrive at any snap judgements because the result was not the same throughout the country.

You know, I have conducted several election campaigns and I have found that no election is the same. No two elections in a general election are





**Q Are you distancing yourself from the government?**

**A My responsibility is as commerce minister. Whoever is in charge of the party will discharge those responsibilities**

the same. They are different, situations are different everywhere.

You have to accept that when the people cast their vote at the last general election, they gave you a mandate, but a mandate with reservations. They did not knock out the Congress party. After all, 192 seats is not a small amount.

So I don't think we should forget that.

Basically, people are interested in performance. They are not interested in your vendettas. If you don't deliver, you will lose out. It is not easy surviving in this system.

The point is that every individual has his pride. Everyone thinks the Indian electorate is very intelligent. You can't fool them. And if in their opinion they feel you will do good to them, they will vote you in. And if you can't deliver, they'll vote you out. They are not interested in party flags and individuals.

Because of the numbers, we now have a government where accountability will be at its highest. And if you hold public office, you should be prepared for it.

**Q:** But it isn't as easy as it sounds. How do you react to the pressures *within*—from these 142 MPs? Devi Lal has called you names. He's complained that too many Jan Morcha people have seats in the Cabinet.

**A:** (Laughs) Well, I wouldn't like to comment on anything Devi Lalji has said.

### DISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT

**Q:** Yes, but what's it like functioning in such a government? That's the other



**Q Do you think the FIRs are a mistake?**

**A I don't believe the election was won or lost on Bofors, HDW, Airbus, etc., at all**

side of 'accountability and delivering the goods', isn't it?

**A:** (Smiles) Let me put it this way. My day-to-day operations are not affected by any of those statements.

In fact, I just had a call from a colleague of mine, asking if I read the latest statements! But I'm in the happy position of reading very little of all this. I've a one-track mind and concentrate on running my ministry.

**Q:** Yes, but that's all you seem to spend your time doing.

**A:** The point is it is not my style to do things in half measures. I have a responsibility and I must discharge it.

**Q:** Nobody disputes that. But when you were power minister and internal security minister under Rajiv, you managed to do more than just concentrate on your ministry. Now, you seem to be distancing yourself from this government by concentrating only on the commerce ministry.

**A:** Well, if you go back in time, a lot of people were complaining that I had been demoted when I became power minister (smiles).

**Q:** Minister without power was the phrase we used.

**A:** Yes (laughs). That's right. The fact is that as energy minister, I spent my time on the ministry of energy and nothing else. And there were lots of complaints that I wasn't meeting people, but I didn't meet them because it wasn't my business to meet them. Earlier, I was general secretary of the party, so I used to meet everyone. But as energy minister, I refused to meet them and people thought I was being very uppity.

**Q:** That's a very ingenious parallel. But the feeling does persist that you are distancing yourself from the Janata Dal's shenanigans.

**A:** It is not a question of distancing myself. The point is I just don't have the time. As I told you earlier, while it is very important what you do, it is equally important what you don't do.

My responsibilities are to the commerce and tourism ministries. Whoever is in charge of the party will discharge those responsibilities. I don't see why I should concern myself with them when I have a job to handle.

**Q:** And it has nothing to do with the fact that you don't agree with a lot of what is going on?

**A:** We are a collective team. We have



a collective leadership. I am a member of the top policy-making bodies. Whatever views I have to express, I will express at those bodies. But once decisions are taken, I support them. That's how the system works. That's what Cabinet government is about.

## RAJIV GANDHI

**Q:** Do you bear any ill-will to Rajiv Gandhi?

**A:** No. Why should I?

**Q:** Well, because he treated you quite badly, that's why.

**A:** He suffered for it. I didn't (laughs).

**Q:** It's that simple?

**A:** The fact is Rajiv was Prime Minister. We fought. We won. He lost. It's as simple as that.

Now the slate is clean. Why should I bear any ill-will?

**Q:** You are, presumably, aware of moves within the Congress(I) to recall you?

**A:** Where's the question of the Congress party recalling me? I'm not at anyone's beck and call (laughs).

**Q:** All right. Not recalling you, but inviting you.

**A:** The point is I'm a member of the Janata Dal and in the political game as I see it, everyone should keep talking

**Q** Were you really against the Punjab accord?

**A** Not in principle... But common sense told me that if two-thirds of the people on the field opposed it, then it wasn't going to work



to each other. I think there's no harm in that.

People who say they don't meet A, B or C only show their lack of maturity. Many of my colleagues have asked me if they should talk to Congressmen. And I've said, "Of course!

Talk to them, invite them and do it openly!" You don't have to meet somebody under the banyan tree at midnight. What for? It is a free country. It isn't a police state.

**Q:** In that case, the obvious question. Is there any truth to the rumours that you are in touch with Rajiv?

**A:** Yes, of course, I'm in touch with him. I've met him several times. And we meet at banquets. Why, we just met day before yesterday!

**Q:** And does that mean there may be realignments?

**A:** (Laughs) We are in the government. We are in the Janata Dal. He is in the Congress. So good luck to the Congress. Good luck to the Janata Dal. And let's leave it to the people of India to decide.

What I'm trying to say is that it's not a question of realignments. Why must barriers exist between anyone? We are a democracy. It is a very healthy sign if people communicate with each other.

It is only a fool who doesn't communicate. It's very immature and it doesn't speak well politically of anyone if you try to be restrictive in your behaviour. And it doesn't do anyone any good. It's an open society. ●

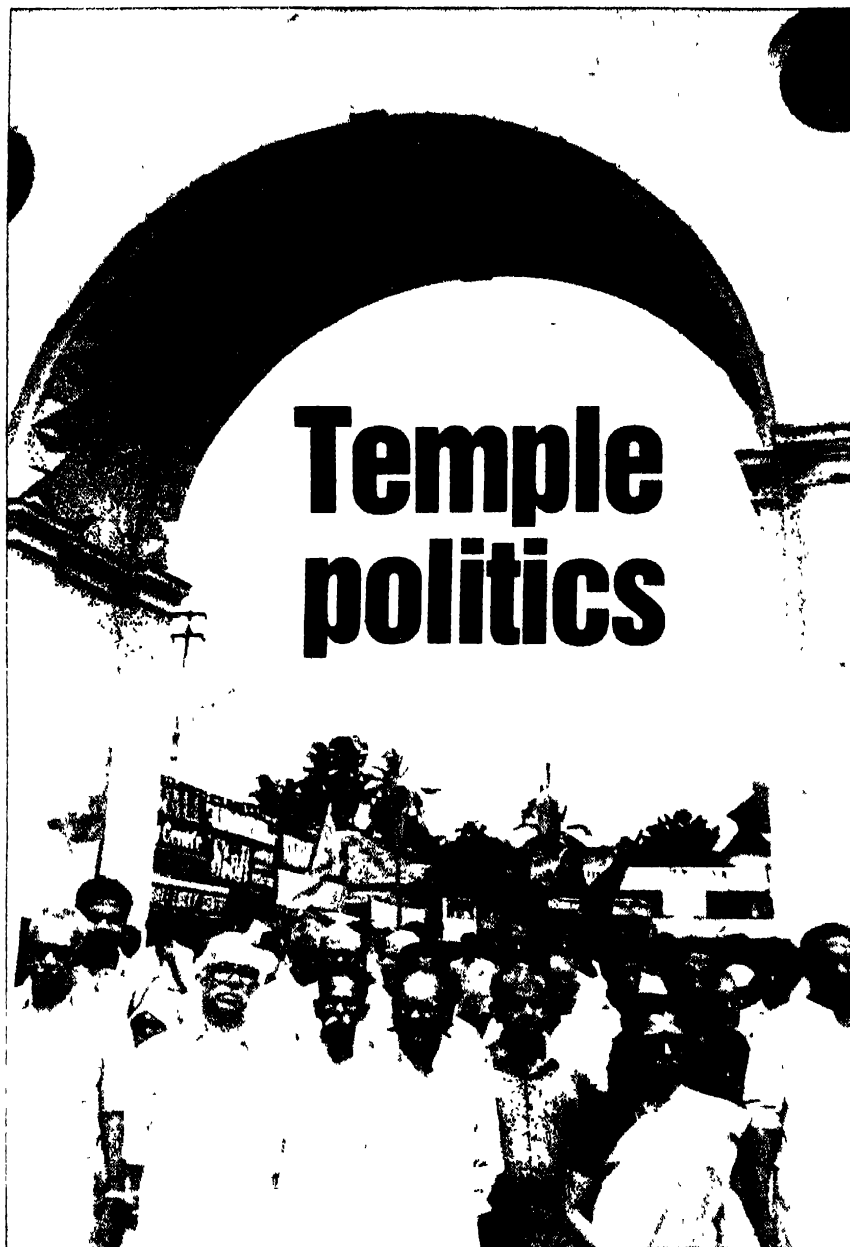
**Q** Do you oppose the FIRs because your name might come up?

**A** They can take my power of attorney and can go to Switzerland or wherever they want to. I have nothing to hide



Interviewed by Vir Sanghvi/New Delhi





Members of Hindu organisations demonstrating in Trivandrum

**M**arxists usually steer clear of religious controversies, but the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government of Kerala has initiated a move that might land itself in one. Recently, the E. K. Nayanar regime decided to amend the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1960, which clearly stipulates that only Hindus who believed in God and temple worship could become members or elect office-bearers to the state's Devaswom boards—institutions that administer Hindu temples in

### *The Kerala Marxist regime tries to gain control of Hindu places of worship*

the Travancore-Cochin belt. Of course, the aim of the Marxists is purely political, to gain control of the temple administration in the Travancore-Cochin areas.

The government's move came in the wake of the historic Kerala High

Court judgment on 10 April. Following a petition filed by the president of the Kerala Hindu Dharma Protection Council, Muraleedharan Nair, a division bench of the High Court ruled that only those who believed in God and temple worship are eligible for election to the state's Devaswom boards. Initially, the government wanted to file a special leave petition before the Supreme Court to set aside the High Court ruling. However, the Speaker of the Kerala Assembly, Varkala Radhakrishnan—he is close to the CPI(M) supremo, E. M. S. Namboodiripad—felt that the verdict amounted to "legislation by the judiciary."

While delivering the judgment, the High Court examined in detail the contentious Section Four of the law on Hindu Religious Endorsements passed by the then Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly in 1950. Under the legislation, only Hindu members of the Assembly could vote for any election to the Devaswom boards. The High Court, while upholding the validity of the law, gave its historic ruling.

The government's argument before the court was that Devaswom boards were administrative bodies and even if Marxist legislators were elected, it would have no impact on the religious aspects—which were looked after by the *thantries*, who decided what the temple rites should be and how they should be performed.

Speaker Radhakrishnan also pointed out that when the disputed law was enacted, several amendments to it were brought forward seeking to define the term "Hindu" as one who believed in the Almighty and temple worship. The Assembly, however, dismissed all of them summarily. But in 1984, Congress(I) chief minister Karunakaran brought an ordinance which clarified that a "Hindu was one who believed in God and temple worship." The move was clearly aimed at keeping the Marxists off temple trusts. At that time a majority of the Hindu MLAs were in the Opposition benches and communists who refused to swear by God—and they didn't because it was against party ideology—were not allowed to contest Devaswom board elections. But the ordinance was allowed to lapse as Karunakaran could not muster enough legislative support.

Taking advantage of this, in 1989, K. G. Venugopal, an activist of the Congress(S)—a constituent of the rul-



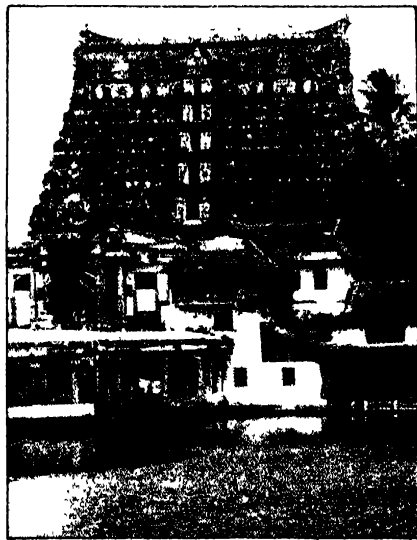
ing LDF coalition—was elected to a Devaswom board by Hindu legislators of the CPI(M). But the Kerala High Court squashed Venugopal's election in the famous 10 April judgment.

Pushed to the wall, Speaker Radhakrishnan suggested legislative amendments and hurriedly introduced the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions (Third Amendment) Bill in the House. If it becomes a law, the immediate fallout would be that Saraswati Kunjukrishnan of the Congress(I) would lose her place in the Devaswom board to the LDF nominee, K G Venugopal, whose election was set aside by the High Court recently. But the Bill has already run into trouble, with the Congress(I) and several Hindu organisations determined to thwart the government's move. Former chief minister K. Karunakaran of the Congress(I) has, in particular, criticised the LDF regime for "trying to thrust non-believers on the administration of temples." He also accused the Marxists of mixing religion and politics.

Understandably, the Nayanar regime is in a dilemma. It simply cannot ignore the powerful Hindu organisations in the state, all of whom are dead against the Bill. Swamy Satyananda Saraswati, patron of the Kerala Temple Protection Council, warned that any attempt to entrust temple administration to non-believers would be resisted. Argued Saraswati: "A temple is a place of worship and how can people who do not believe in God be allowed to interfere."

Regarding Speaker Varkala Radhakrishnan's assertion that since Devaswom boards were funded by the government, it has a certain responsibility to discharge, the Swamy said that the annuity being paid to the board was no charity. Because, all the landed properties of the temples were taken away by the government through legislations. Added Saraswati: "If one were to calculate the present value of those properties, the current annuity of Rs 46.5 lakhs fixed 40 years back is peanuts." He also warned that any move to circumvent the High Court ruling would not only amount to a contempt of court but would also be a challenge to the entire Hindu community.

The government is trying to sell the line that it is trying to gain control of the temple trusts solely because the Devaswom board has become a cess-



**A temple in Trivandrum: will the Marxists gain control?**

pool of corruption. K. Mohanan, former MP and president of the CITU-led Travancore Devaswom Employees Federation, charged that the board was neck-deep in scandals.

But Hindu organisations in the state

boards are being used by successive governments to accommodate politicians and the religious trusts have been reduced to state-run corporations.

Within the House too, the LDF regime faced a lot of hostility. Congress(I) members vehemently opposed the Bill. But the unkindest cut came from none other than the former CPI(M) leader, M V Raghavan. Much to the embarrassment of the Marxists, he said, "If you are communists, why do you want to be recognised as Hindus? Your own leader, EMS, had declared a few years back that he was a communist and not a Hindu."

Fearing that the Hindu fundamentalist groups could upstage the Congress(I) on this sensitive issue, Karunakaran has somewhat modified his stand on the Bill. He has reportedly assured the CPI(M) leadership in Kerala that he would ask the Congress(I) nominee, Saraswathy Kunjukrishnan, to resign from the Travancore Devaswom Board. After all, Karunakaran reasoned, the purpose of the Bill was to unseat her and fill up the

**The Kerala Assembly Speaker, Varkala Radhakrishnan, feels that since Devaswom boards were funded by the government, it certainly has a responsibility to discharge**



are suspicious of the government's intentions. Asked a senior RSS leader, "Will the administration dare to take over the churches and mosques of the state?" The RSS is also upset at the recent proposal adopted by the Travancore Devaswom Board which says that non-Hindus could enter temples under its jurisdiction. Hindu organisations are all the more piqued because the controversial idea was mooted by the president of the board, who happens to be a relative of Namboodiripad and is himself a nominee of the LDF. There is a feeling among Hindus that Devaswom

vacancy with an LDF candidate.

Realising perhaps that the political fallout of the issue could be disastrous for the LDF, the government has finally decided to clarify in the Bill it has introduced in the Assembly that all nominees for election to Devaswom boards should declare their faith in God and temple worship. This strange clause will be tagged on to the amendment Bill when it comes back to the Assembly for its final passage. And if Marxist members do declare faith in God and temples, they will be creating history of sorts. •

**Sreedhar Pillay/Trivandrum**



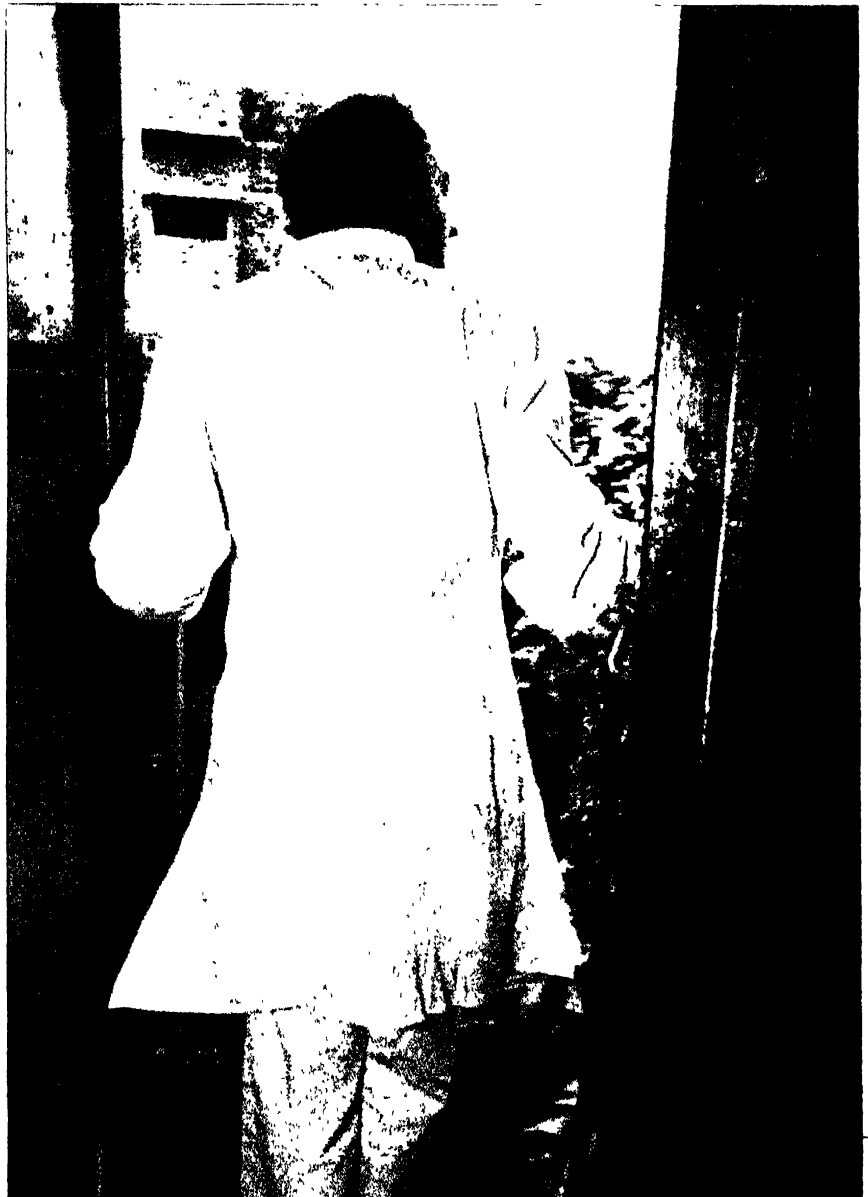
# BACK IN ACTION

*After a period of introspection, Rajiv Gandhi hits the road*

**T**he comeback trail Rajiv seems to have decided, leads by way of second-class railway compartments, dusty one horse towns and open-top jeeps with the occasional Maruti Gypsy thrown in for relief — from which bemused crowds can be hectored into proper appreciation. Security is taboo (no bullet proof cars, Black Cat commandoes, etc.) on this mingle-with-the masses *yatra*, as are the usual hangers-on (read R. K. Dhanwan, M. I. Fotedar, Satish Sharma). Equally dispensable are Mani Shankar Aiyar's speech-writing skills, all *bhashans* are to be extempore, in colloquial Hindi, and rattled off with a fluency unheard of in Gandhi's *hume-dekhna-hai* days. The air-conditioned prime ministership is history. Leader of the Opposition Gandhi intends to sweat his way back to power.

First on the new improved Rajiv's agenda, a *Bharat darshan* where direct contact with the people would, presumably, set things right for the Congress. And in keeping with the current obsession with his namesake, the Mahatma, the tour would commence in Champaran district of Bihar, where Gandhiji had begun his non-cooperation movement.

On 12 June, therefore, a King Air five-seater aircraft was hired from the Delhi Flying Club. Rajiv, weighed down only with a suitcase, entered the cockpit and flew to a Second World War vintage airstrip on the outskirts of Raxaul in north Bihar. His somewhat dubious record at piloting the nation notwithstanding, the former Prime Minister executed a faultless





landing, and emerged from the craft, to board a jeep which was to take him to Raxaul, proper.

It took Gandhi 20 minutes to execute the three-kilometre stretch to the town. And as Rajiv rode down the main street in an open jeep, large crowds materialised on either side of the road, some gaping at him in idle curiosity, while others cheered him in the manner of die-hard supporters. A visibly-moved Gandhi made his usual gestures—a *namaskar* here, a handshake there and the occasional garland thrown back into the crowd.

Raxaul formed the pattern for much of Rajiv's visit. His progress through the state—Betia, Muzaffarpur, Barauni, Begusarai, Lakhisarai, Sheikhsarai and countless villages—was marked by large, attentive crowds, who seemed to have turned up out of their own sweet will, and not because they had been promised a free meal and Rs 10. If mass contact had been the Congress president's primary objective during his *Bharat darshan*, he had made an excellent beginning in Bihar.

**R**ajiv too seemed reasonably satisfied with the way things had worked out. He told *SUNDAY*: "I had not expected such a response. This is very encouraging. Both party workers and the people have reacted with tremendous warmth and enthusiasm during this visit. I can always tell the difference between an organised crowd and a spontaneous one. This is a spontaneous response, which is also indicative of the resentment against the present government."

But rather than criticise the Dal government, Rajiv concentrated on putting his case before the people. The reasons behind the electoral loss of the Congress came in for special mention. Gandhi had his own views on the matter. "Some people say that we lost the elections because the leaders of our party were fighting each other, some others say that we lost because of the Bhagalpur riots, yet others suggest it was the Ayodhya issue, while some say we lost because of the erosion in our vote bank. I feel all these assessments are correct, but the question arises as to why the Congress could not deal with these. The people were misled because Congressmen could not reach the people."

The confessional mood prevailed through most of Rajiv's public speeches. The Congress, he said, had won the 1971, 1980, 1984 elections

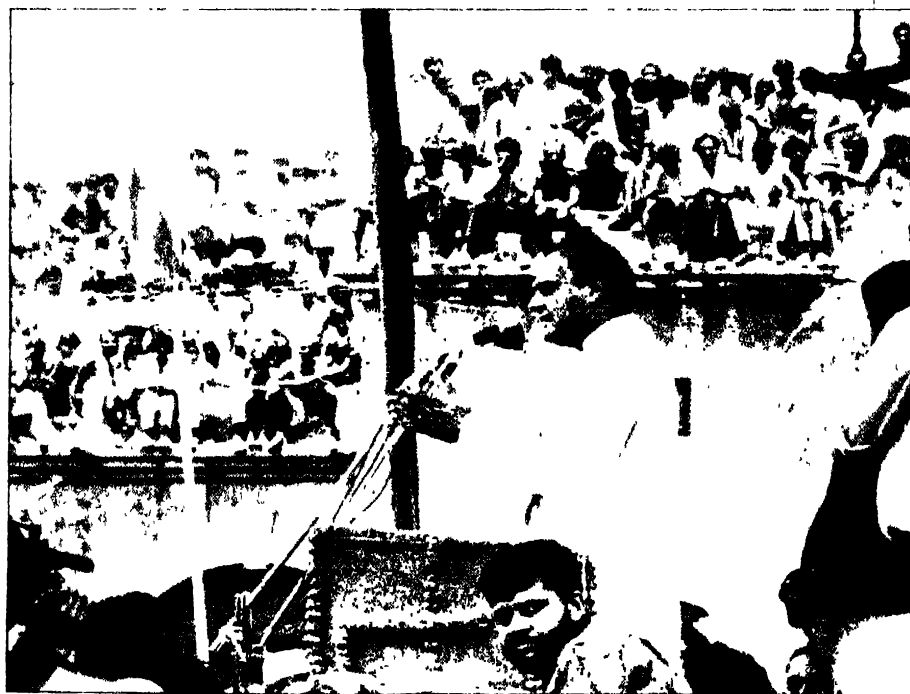
only on the strength of a wave. The party had no organisational structure since 1971. Now, his priority was to get his house in order in time for the next general election. Organisational elections would be completed in eight to nine months, and a fresh membership drive launched. The primary members of the party would deal with the problem of dissidence in their own way. Only when the party was fighting fit, would he come back to the electorate for a fresh mandate—there was absolutely no question of his toppling the Raja to get back into Race Course Road through the back door.

All this in chaste Hindi, with no trace of the public-school affectations, which marked him a Dosco the moment he opened his mouth. (Of late, Gandhi—in a move bound to gladden

Mulayam Singh Yadav's heart—has begun to work on his Hindi, even going to the extent of poring over Hindi newspapers for the better part of the morning.)

His oratorical skills practised on the residents of Raxaul, Gandhi was led to a "special" lunch, laid out by the local Congress leaders. But, in keeping with his new man of the people image, Rajiv refused the repast, preferring to squat with the party workers on the floor and eat off leaf plates, no less.

**F**rom Raxaul it was on to Betia, where, at around 5 pm, Rajiv boarded the second-class compartment of 442 Down passenger train to Muzaffarpur. Why second-class? The decision, explained Gandhi smilingly,



**Rajiv's meetings attracted large crowds, who turned up of their own will, not because they had been promised a free meal and Rs 10**

had been taken by the Central Working Committee of the party. And why had he played along? "This way I can be with the people," he said.

At the Betia railway station, however, Rajiv seemed to have got too much of a good thing. The crowds on the platform made it impossible for anyone to board the train. In fact, several newsmen would have been left behind if Rajiv hadn't appeared at the door of his compartment to pull them in. This eager-to-please air survived throughout the tour, with Gandhi regaling journalists with his quip-a-minute style of political discussion.

What contributed to Gandhi's cheerfulness, no doubt, was the love



that the people seemed to bear him. The train to Muzaffarpur halted at every station—after every 10 kms approximately—and at every stop there were thousands waiting patiently at the platform, hoping to catch a glimpse of the former PM. Those who couldn't find place on the platform, clambered on top of the train and near-by trees, and a fortunate few even managed to shake hands with him. Rajiv, for his part, jumped into the thick of things, much to the consternation of those deputed to guard him: sub-inspectors S P Sagar and T P Gupta of the Delhi police. "We were not expecting such crowds", they muttered helplessly, "how can two of us control lakhs of people?"

Congress leader Dr Jagannath Mishra also advised Rajiv against mingling with the crowd. The station was ill-lit, he cautioned, and Rajiv shouldn't risk his life in this manner. Gandhi snubbed Mishra. "When the people themselves want to see me, why should I bother about security?"

**A**nd the people certainly did want to see him. Not surprisingly then, the scene at every platform resembled a public meeting more than anything else, with Gandhi jumping into the midst of the crowd, hand mike in hand to address the multitudes. Old men and women stood around with garlands in hand, while one enterprising lady handed Rajiv a packet of *parathas* and pickle, for his dinner. The Congress president shared the meal with Dr Jagannath Mishra and other Congress leaders at night, and if appearances are anything to go by, enjoyed it immensely.

The five hour journey ended in Muzaffarpur, the train arriving a good one hour late, in the time-honoured tradition of the Indian railways. Rajiv alighted and made his way out, handing over his ticket to the collector, like any other passenger.

In Muzaffarpur, the former Prime Minister was put up at the Circuit House. But his stay wasn't the most comfortable, the power went off three times during the night, the air-conditioning didn't seem to work, and the mosquitoes seemed to have taken grave exception to the great man's presence. Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav had—deliberately, said some—called the district magistrate, Amitabh Verma to Patna. But the DM had already made a prestige issue out of making the Gandhi visit go off well—and the arrangements were per-

**In keeping with his new man of the people image, Rajiv squatted with the party workers on the floor and ate off a leaf plate**



fect

Rajiv was scheduled to address a public meeting, where other Congress leaders would also speak. But, at the last moment, Gandhi had a change of heart. Nobody but ordinary party workers would speak, he decreed. About 100 Congressmen, thus, got the opportunity to have their say, with their president listening patiently.

The move didn't go down too well with Bihar Congress leaders, though. Former chief minister Bhagwat Jha Azad, for one, was very unhappy at being kept off the microphone, and his supporters shouted slogans in an attempt to disrupt the meeting. But Rajiv remained unfazed.

After having tea with the "intellectuals" of the district at the campus of the law college, Gandhi boarded the train to Barauni.

**T**his journey wasn't one which Gandhi would be happy to remember. His compartment was hot and sweaty, and Rajiv spent most of his time on the footboard of the train. Several Congress leaders were in attendance, each trying to outdo the other, as far as sycophancy went. Former Kerala Governor, Ram Dulari Sinha compared Rajiv to the Mahatma, who had commenced his anti-British campaign

in Champaran. She was snubbed for her pains. Ex-MP Prabhavati Gupta earned Gandhi's displeasure for going on about her son's contribution towards the organisation of his visit.

The train arrived at Barauni at around 9.30 pm, and Gandhi addressed an impromptu public meeting at the station itself. A bullet-proof car







**The decision to travel second-class was taken by the Central Working Committee of the party. And Rajiv is not complaining**

had been provided by the administration, but Rajiv preferred to ride Congress MP S S Ahluwalia's Maruti Gypsy instead. After a night's stay at the Indian Oil guest house in Barauni, Gandhi hit the road to Sheikhsarai, where he was scheduled to attend a state-level conference of Congress leaders. At every five kilometres there

were large crowds of villagers, beating drums to greet the former Prime Minister. In one village, Gandhi was made to stop and taken to a house where a newly wed girl wanted to receive his blessings.

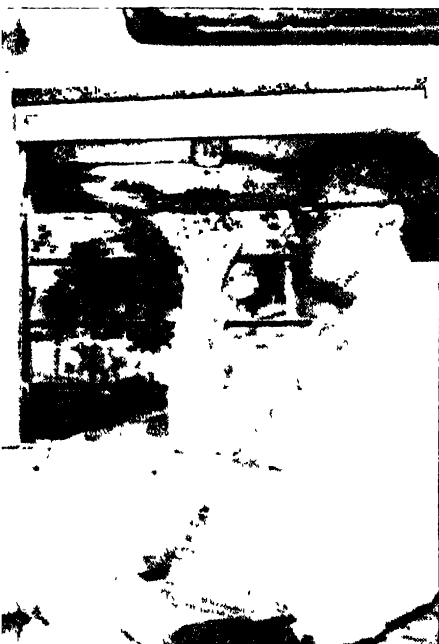
In Lakhisarai, the DM advised Rajiv to ride a bullet proof car, as the Naxalites were rather active in that

area. Gandhi clambered on to the roof of the Maruti Gypsy instead, to travel to Sheikhsarai. The crowds made rapid progress impossible; in fact, it took Rajiv one and a half hour to cover a five kilometre stretch. The party meeting at Sheikhsarai had willy-nilly been converted into a public rally, because of the huge crowds in attendance. (His cabinet leader, Turg Anwar, also saw fit to show up.)

From Sheikhsarai, it was on to Patna. Here, Gandhi boarded the Indian Airlines flight to Delhi, going through the security check like other passengers, and then standing around, suitcase in hand, waiting for the airlines' staff to announce boarding. Then it was time for baggage identification, while children milled around waiting to take the former PM's autograph. On the craft, Gandhi took a few minutes off to convivialise with his former TV colleagues.

On the whole, it was an entirely new Rajiv that the people were seeing. And they turned up in increasingly large numbers to marvel at the almost miraculous transformation. But only time—and the results of the next election—can tell whether they approved of the image overhaul. ●

**Rajiv Shukla/North Bihar with Seema Goswami**



**When Congress leader Jagannath Mishra advised Rajiv against mingling with the crowds, he retorted, "When the people want to see me, why should I bother about security?"**





# TAXING PROBLEMS

*Is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad guilty of tax evasion?*

**T**he country's most powerful religious organisation, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), has proved that it can even take on the Centre. In March this year, the income tax department had issued two notices to the office-bearers of this Hindu outfit asking them to furnish details of the VHP's financial affairs for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90. The income tax department had suspected that the VHP was not disclosing its real earnings and could be guilty of tax evasion. But the income tax authorities had perhaps misjudged the political clout of the VHP. As it turned out, it was the income tax department that ended up being the loser.

The tax notices were served on 7 March, 1990. That very day, hundreds of VHP supporters demonstrated in front of Prime Minister V.P. Singh's house. The BJP, too, reportedly put pressure on the government. Result, the next day, the IT department was instructed to withdraw the notices and the officer who had served them—deputy director V.B. Gupta—was transferred out of New Delhi to Tamil Nadu. The VHP had won. From that day, no income tax sleuth would dare investigate the VHP's financial affairs.

And it is not that the VHP's financial dealings do not require investigation. The IT official V.B. Gupta, who was transferred for acting against the VHP, says, "The income tax department in Delhi has in its possession a large number of fraudulent receipts issued by the VHP, which, if pursued, could result in the conviction of all the 26 members of the governing council of this organisation including the secretary general and Vijayaraje Scindia."

Even stranger perhaps is the case of the missing documents. The VHP had filed its tax returns for the year 1988-89 on 30 October, 1989, and the IT receipt clerk had affirmed that all

supporting documents had been submitted. However, not a single document supposed to have been annexed to the VHP's tax returns for 1988-89 can be traced. Neither the VHP nor its chartered accountants, V.A. Shankar Aiyar and Company, had bothered to submit duplicates of the missing documents. "Are these documents missing or were they never submitted at all. Was the receipt clerk at the IT office bribed to put the stamp without the annexures?" Gupta conjectures. Whatever the truth, the fact that the VHP did everything to scuttle the enquiry into its financial affairs suggests that the organisation had something to hide.

Gupta today is extremely bitter about the way the VHP has got away with time and again. He points out that the VHP was accorded the status of a charitable organisation in 1985-86 despite the Union law ministry's advice

**Vijayaraje Scindia at the VHP's shilanyas ceremony: a powerful voice**



to the contrary. The law ministry in its ruling on the 'Virat Hindu Sabha' case, had categorically stated that no organisation created for purely religious purposes should be accorded the status of a 'charitable institution' and allowed benefits under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. The VHP's avowed objective is to propagate the cause of 'Hindutva', which presumably includes the demolition of mosques. Yet, not only did Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I) government give 'charitable institution' status to the VHP but so did V.P. Singh's government in March this year. Consequently, donations made to the VHP are tax deductible.

**T**his concession, income tax department officials claim, has helped the VHP to acquire enormous financial and political clout. "The income tax department has in its possession several numbered and unnumbered coupons and receipts that the VHP issued against donations in villages





**VHP supporters protesting in front of the PM's house: blackmailing the government?**

and towns. Gupta alleges. It is also suggested that Hindu traders who support the organisation use it to launder their unaccounted money. For instance, a trader by donating Rs 1,000 could get a receipt showing he had given Rs 10,000 and thereby get tax deductions for the larger amount. All this could be proved if there is a proper and detailed investigation into the financial affairs of the VHP. And if Gupta is to be believed, the VHP has not submitted proper accounts for the financial years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

But the VHP is in no mood to allow an investigation. The VHP contends that Gupta is sore at being transferred and is concocting allegations against the organisation. 'All our accounts are upto date and we are answerable to our contributors,' asserts VHP secretary-general Ashoke Singhal. He

also denies that the VHP has been accorded the status of a charitable institution. On the contrary, he claims that it is the VHP which is being persecuted by the government. His specific complaint is regarding the government's refusal to allow foreign contributions for its temple project at the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site.

'Three and a-half years ago, 10,000-odd organisations were registered for receiving foreign donations running into a total of about Rs 400 crores,' says Singhal. 'That figure must be Rs 1,000 crores today. Most of this money, he claims, came from Muslim and Christian groups abroad for charitable work in India. In reality,' he alleges, 'it (the money) is used to proselytisation of backward people like tribals. This is foreign money that foreigners are pouring into this country to divide it. Yet, it is the VHP alone which has to apply to the home ministry for permission to accept each cheque (from abroad).



**Ashoke Singhal, secretary-general of the VHP: denying the allegations**

**The fact that the VHP did everything to scuttle the enquiry into its financial affairs suggests that the organisation had something to hide**

The finance ministry claims that existing laws do not allow foreign donations for religious purposes. Finance ministry officials point out that the money that comes to religious organisations from abroad is solely meant for development and charitable work. They add that even the VHP is entitled to receive foreign money for its social projects. In fact, the VHP runs a network of hostels, primary and secondary schools, and hospitals in about 2,500 places. Many of these projects benefit tribals and backward class people in remote areas, and the VHP receive money from abroad to run many of them.

The VHP, however, feels that it should also be allowed to receive foreign funds for religious purposes. 'Everywhere in the world, religious contributions are treated as charity and are exempt from taxes, except in India,' complains Ashoke Singhal. In fact, another of the VHP's problems with the government stems from its attempts to raise finances for the





**A VHP rally at Delhi's Boat Club: growing influence**

controversial Ayodhya temple. The VHP has created a 'corpus fund' of Rs 8.29 crores for the temple's construction. Most of this money has come in the form of small contributions, and this fund is officially handled by another organisation, the Ram Janma Bhumi Nyas, which has its offices within the VHP headquarters premises.

The VHP claims that the Ram Janma Bhumi Nyas is an independent body floated by a number of Hindu organisations, and not just by the VHP. "We are only collecting contributions for them," says Singhal. "If we spend a single paise out of these contributions ourselves, the entire amount will be assumed as our income and we will be taxed on it." At the same time, Singhal is incensed at the government for banning foreign contributions to the Nyas. On 4 May this year, the home ministry wrote to the Nyas saying that it had decided "after careful consideration" not to accord permission to the Nyas to receive foreign funds. As a result, foreign cheques amounting to a total of Rs 1.5 lakhs for the temple project could not be cashed by the Nyas.

This was at best a small victory for the government, but the VHP used it to make threatening noises. The VHP claimed that many religious organisations have been regularly receiving foreign funds by declaring them to be for social and educational purposes. But many of these outfits, according to the VHP, have been using the funds

for religious purposes. Yet, it was only the VHP that was being singled out.

**T**he government itself seems more than a little confused on the issue. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha on 22 March, 1990, Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed said that "approximately Rs 60 crores are reported to have been received as foreign contributions for construction and repair of all religious places" and that there is no ban on receiving foreign contributions for construction and maintenance of religious places. Subsequently (on 23 March, 1990), deputy home minister Subodh Kant Sahay told the Lok Sabha that religious organisations wishing to receive funds from abroad must first register themselves and formally apply for permission to receive

#### **Ayodhya temple: at the centre of a controversy**



foreign contributions. Sahay added that neither the Babri Masjid Action Committee, which wants the mosque to remain at the disputed site, nor the Ram Janma Bhumi Nyas, which plans to build a temple at the place, have registered themselves or sought prior permission to accept foreign funds.

The VHP points out that if the Nyas had not applied for permission to receive funds from abroad, how could the Union home ministry have written to it rejecting its application after "careful consideration"? The VHP has an argument. And the government has only exposed its contradictory stand on the VHP. As one Janata Dal insider said, V P Singh has adopted a strategy of hitting the VHP in small matters and letting them go on more crucial issues. The government might have blocked Rs 1.5 lakhs of foreign funds but it has shown that it does not want to dig deep into the VHP's financial affairs. The reason for this kind of behaviour on the government's part is fairly obvious.

The VHP commands enormous clout and knows that no government would dare antagonise an organisation that claims to represent the religious interests of the Hindus. Founded in 1964, the VHP today boasts of a membership of over five lakhs. A VHP pamphlet claims that, "Hindus belonging to various political parties have increasingly started identifying themselves as Hindus and have joined the Parishad." Its members include government servants, officials, High Court judges, industrialists, businessmen, educationists and intellectuals. The Parishad spends much of its time organising religious conferences all over the country. It plans to hold a major celebration in Chicago (USA) in 1993 to commemorate the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's famous address to the world religious meeting there.

It is suspected that the ties between the BJP and the VHP are far closer than what is ordinarily assumed. V B Gupta alleges that the VHP financed the BJP during the last elections. As long as Prime Minister V P Singh remains dependent on the BJP for its support to his government, the VHP can be rest assured that it will not be touched. V P Singh, despite all his statements against the VHP, has shown that when it comes to the crunch he cannot act against the country's most powerful Hindu organisation. •

**Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**





The spot of the lynching: back to medievalism

# FRENZY

*The police say that mob violence led to the Bantala tragedy.  
But is that the whole truth?*

**T**he amber lights of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (EMB) glowed barely five kilometres away. If everything went well, the four passengers of a white Maruti van cruising along the Calcutta-Basanti highway would have been home by eight that evening. But everything went wrong as the car approached Bantala, an innocuous hamlet on the eastern fringe of Calcutta. By a strange quirk of fate, the four passengers were subjected to a kind of violence that showed that an insensate mob under Marxist rule could be as brutal as medieval barbarians.

On the morning of 30 May, a Wednesday, Anita Dewan and Uma Ghosh, senior officials in the state family welfare department, along with Ranu Ghosh, programme officer of

the UNICEF, had set out for Gosaba in the Sunderbans in a Maruti van chauffeured by Abani Naiya, a health department driver, to monitor family welfare programmes. They had driven down to Basanti, the terminal point on the Calcutta-Basanti road which meanders through a lush green wilderness that lies to the east of the metropolis. Beyond Basanti, one avails of ferries and motorised boats to reach the hundreds of islands that comprise the Sunderbans.

The officials began their journey back along the same route, setting off from Basanti in their Maruti bearing family welfare and red-cross symbols towards the evening. It was a glitch-free drive all the way till they reached Bantala *haat* (weekly market) in the backyards of Calcutta.

It was about 7.15 pm and all hell

broke loose when the car was passing through the crowded *haat*. Naiya, the driver, noticed that a group of men were about to block the way. As the region is known to be a crime-prone area, Naiya thought it wise not to take any chances, especially when he had three women in the car. So he did what he thought best: he stepped on the accelerator.

The car surged and zipped past the trouble-makers. Enraged by this act of defiance, an incensed crowd chased the vehicle raising the ominous cry, "The child-lifters are running away." The car turned right, raced over a concrete bridge, and then skidded off the road while negotiating a sharp left turn, and got irretrievably stuck in a wayside bog.

The frenzied mob came charging in the darkness, crying murder. Like a



pack of hungry wolves, it dragged out the three women officers and the driver. No one can say for sure how many people actually took part in the ghastly lynching that followed, but the police suspect that about 15 to 20 hardcore criminals spearheaded the attack, stripped the women and bludgeoned them with stones, lathis, kicks and blows. The police say they also used small knives meant for cleaning fish to lacerate the bodies of their victims. Anita Dewan who suffered 46 injuries, had very little hair left on her head. Much of it

Ranu Ghosh of the UNICEF. Uma Ghosh and Naiya, survived the night and were shifted elsewhere the next day. While Ranu Ghosh was taken to Woodlands Nursing Home, Uma Ghosh and Naiya were admitted to the SSKM hospital. On 4 June, Naiya too succumbed to his wounds.

The myth that the law and order situation in the state was best in the country had persisted far too long for inexplicable reasons and the Bantala incident blew that bluff. In the absence of chief minister Jyoti Basu, who was away in Delhi attending a central

was a pre-meditated attack," says a senior police official. Both the police and local CPI(M) leaders believe that the tragedy could have been averted had Naiya stopped the car in the middle of the market, instead of driving away. "This increased the suspicion of the people and sanity gave way to hysteria," says Rapada Makal, a CPI(M) leader from Bantala area.

However, Makal and Nilima Debnath, another CPI(M) activist, say that the spreading of the rumour was a calculated move on the part of someone who had very definite intentions. But the motive still remains unclear amidst a host of possibilities. The relatives of Anita Dewan, including her husband, Manoj Dewan, general secretary of the Social Welfare Association in West Bengal, are unwilling to buy the theory that it was a case of mob violence. "It was a well planned murder," they say, though they are unable to provide any clues to the possible motive.

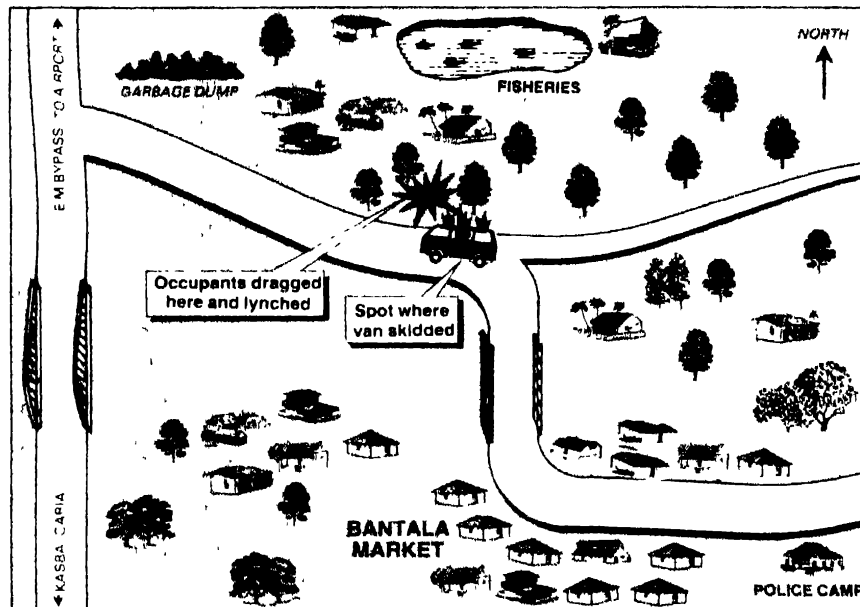
One significant aspect of the rumour doing the rounds in the area was that the child-lifters were moving about in a Maruti Van. The police reveal that the local toughs had stopped vehicles and searched them during the few days preceding the lynching. The question that has so far remained unanswered is: who were they looking for? Did they expect the kidnappers to openly carry the children in cars? Or were the toughs of Bantala, most of whom owe allegiance to the CPI(M), a party that holds absolute sway in the area, looking for someone specific?

As the health department car sped away without giving the local goons the chance to identify its occupants, their suspicion was heightened. They were probably convinced that the people they were looking for had slipped out of their hands. So when they did succeed in besieging the car after it met with an accident, they did not stop to find out whether a child was in fact being whisked away. Instead they got into the act of lynching right away without caring to find out who their victims were.

A senior investigating officer told SUNDAY, "We are not precluding other possibilities and would probe all the theories that are surfacing. But, as of now, we have found nothing to suggest that it was something other than mob fury at the heart of the matter."

Some of the other theories to explain the Bantala crime are:

- The health officials, having hit upon



Bantala and its adjoining areas

was torn off her scalp by the mob. This was revealed by one of Anita's relatives, who failed to recognise her body in hospital.

At about 7.40 pm, constables from a police camp, about half a kilometre away, arrived at the spot. By then the assailants had fled, leaving the three officers and Naiya severely injured. The policemen made frantic efforts to stop passing vehicles, including bus drivers, but no one would cooperate. Finally, they forced a pick-up truck to stop and set off towards Tiljala police station in east Calcutta. According to Abani Biswas, officer-in-charge, Tiljala thana, "The injured presented a ghastly picture. Of the three women, two were completely naked and only one had some semblance of clothing on her body. But all, including the driver, had horrifying wounds."

The victims were rushed to Chittaranjan Hospital, where, according to sources, Anita Dewan succumbed to her injuries at 1.10 am on 31 May.

committee meeting of the CPI(M), health minister Prasanta Sur admitted that the Bantala area was a haven for anti-socials. "The women officers should have returned before sunset," Sur is reported to have remarked. And Basu, who has a dismissive way of rebutting criticisms, reacted in a manner that can at best be termed irresponsible. When asked by reporters whether the incident was a reflection on the state's law and order situation, Basu said "Why so? Anti-social elements do indulge in such activities." To the chief minister, Bantala was no aberration. He made it seem as though it was part of life.

**M**ore than 15 days after the incident, the motive behind the lynching remained unclear. The police maintain that the officers were the victims of mass frenzy built up by a rumour that child-lifters were operating in the area. "So far we have found nothing which would suggest that it



a drug racket, had incurred the wrath of someone influential

- The people of Bantala, who have a running feud with fishery owners, had planned to liquidate some of their opponents and struck at the health officials by mistake

- The real targets were the Ananda Margis, who are trying to make inroads into the Sunderbans area

Manoj Dewan, as well as the UNICEF, rules out the drug racket theory. Says a distraught Dewan, "Anita had never mentioned any such thing. Moreover, the team comprised extension workers who had nothing to do with the procurement or distribution of drugs."

The second line of reasoning, which suggests that the CPI(M)-led fishermen's unions were out to rough up some fishing barons who still control the region's lucrative fisheries, is not entirely implausible. But the pieces in the puzzle are yet to fall into place.

However, the claim made by Acharya Jagadiswarananda, law secretary of the Ananda Marg, deepens the suspicion that the Bantala lynching was indeed a case of misdirected wrath. Jagadiswarananda



Anita Dewan with her husband

told SUNDAY that the Ananda Margis own a Maruti van similar to the health department vehicle and it was often used by the Margis for going to the Sunderbans via Bantala.

Jagadiswarananda says that the relation of the Margis with the CPI(M) has become extremely tense in the region after the religious sect decided to set up "master units" in every block of South 24 Parganas district along the lines of its Anandanagar project in Purulia. For this, the Margis have acquired land in one of the areas much to the chagrin of the CPI(M).

Recalling the 1982 incident in which 17 Margis were burnt to death

in Calcutta, Jagadiswarananda claimed that a rumour about child-litters being active had been spread then also. "I learnt about the rumours in Bantala area a few days before this tragic incident and instructed our people not to venture in that area," says the Acharya. Jagadiswarananda also wonders why the rumour-mongers had been categorical enough to mention that a Maruti van was being used by the child-litters. "Was our vehicle the target?" he asks.

No matter what the motive behind the crime is, the CPI(M) and the state administration can hardly wash their hands off by laying the blame squarely on the anti-socials. The question the CPI(M) must answer is why the anti-socials were allowed to thrive in an area where the party is in absolute command. The CPI(M) has advocated tough measures against terrorists in Punjab and Kashmir but has consistently fought shy of eradicating organised crime in a state it has been in power for 13 years. Or could the reality be the other way round: the CPI(M) has thrived by striking a deal with the anti-socials? •

Anish Gupta/Calcutta



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# The Raja's PR

*It has everything to do with Public Relations and little to do with Panchayati Raj*



Who is the most ardent admirer of Rajiv Gandhi? Move over, K.K. Tewari. Come on board, V.P. Singh. For, if imitation is the highest form of flattery, the agenda papers prepared for the Chief Ministers' Conference on Panchayati Raj and Urban

Local Bodies constitute the highest tribute ever paid to the former Prime Minister. Every single one of the proposals (bar two—and we shall come to these shortly) has been pinched wholesale from the previous government's Panchayati Raj (PR) and Nagarpalikas (NP) Constitution Amendment Bills.

And not just the thoughts, but the details, the nuances, the very language as well. It is testimony, at one and the same time, both to the National Front's poverty of thought and to the truly "historic and revolutionary" vision of the PR/NP Bills—a description much derided by the V.P. Singh Gang last year, when they were demonstrating their commitment to democracy by removing themselves *en masse* from the cut and thrust of debate on the floor of the Lok Sabha (but sticking like limpets to their seats in the other House!).

What then distinguishes the National Front's brand of grassroots democracy from the Rajiv-sponsored Bills? Two matters of detail—and one of fundamental significance. Let's get the matters of detail out of the way first, and then turn to the key divide.

V.P. Singh has proposed that *nyaya panchayats* be handled in the same package as Panchayati Raj. Now, V.P. Singh knows well (or, possibly, doesn't—for what is he, after all, but a mere Prime Minister, yet, Vinod Pande certainly does, for he is, after all, a man of substance—the Prime Minister's Cabinet secretary, no less!) that the former Prime Minister had

intended to deal with *nyaya panchayats* in the context of judicial reform rather than democratic decentralisation. Why? Well, since so many of you, my dear readers, dash off irate Letters to the editor every time I play my RG record, let me give you the logic of this approach in the words (which he will doubtless now rue) of one of V.P. Singh's most enamoured "outside supporters", E.M.S. Namboodiripad. "There is no enthusiasm for *nyaya panchayats*, the reason being that people do not expect elected *panches* to be objective and do justice to the poor. Any proposal for bringing the judiciary closer to the people can, therefore, be considered only as a matter of reforming the judicial system and not as a part of the democratic decentralisation of administration."

Need one say more?

The second "innovative" thought (and that closes the chapter on fresh thinking by the NF!) thrown up by the new dispensation is that village *panchayats* should, in a manner of speaking, seek the "advice and consent" of the *gram sabhas* (comprising all adult electors in the village) much in the manner that the US President derives legitimacy from the approval and endorsement of the American Congress.

Good idea, we dropped it only for the highly technical reason that in parts of India—such as the mountain terrain of Lahaul-Spiti or Arunachal Pradesh, the desert areas of Rajasthan, and the atomised tribal hamlets of the Aravalli hills and the Dandakaranya forests (where dwellings are widely scattered even within a single village)—it might not easily be possible to constitutionally enforce the holding of frequent *gram sabha* meetings. And if one constitutional provision cannot be enforced, the sanctity of the other provisions is called into question. So, we thought we could leave this marginal matter to the discretion of different states.

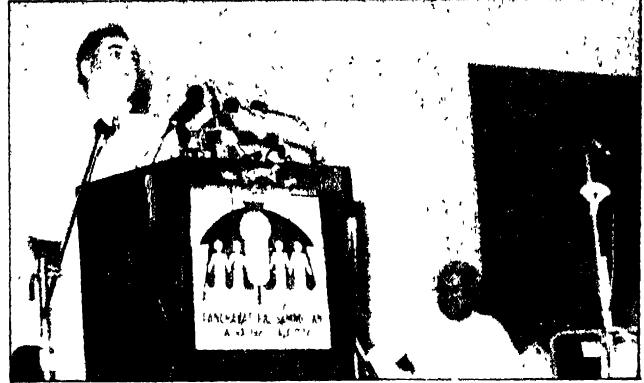
But, whatever the constitutional



niceties, the disturbing thing is that V.P. Singh (oops, sorry, I mean Vinod Pande) insists that the interval between consecutive meetings of the *gram sabha* "should not exceed a period of three months" (para 20.5) but in the next sub-para lists the functions of the *gram sabha* as comprising the consideration of the *annual* accounts, the *annual* report for the "preceding year", the *annual* budget. In other words, the *gram sabha's* statutory role is finished at a single annual meeting; it has no real competence for any other matter in the other (not less than quarterly) meetings proposed!

Now, how is it that such woolly thinking has slipped past so sharp a mind as Vinod Pande's? I'll let you into the secret. Pande's performance was razor-sharp when he had to answer to a Prime Minister who was a stickler for precision, fussy about detail to the point of perversity. Now that he has a PM above (?) him, whose head for detail is limited to determining whether he should so perch a cap atop it as to look like an Oberoi Hotel chef or a Greek Orthodox priest, friend Vinod's perform-





**Rajiv Gandhi:** *If imitation is the highest form of flattery, the agenda papers on Panchayati Raj constitute the highest tribute ever paid to him*

**(Left): V.P. Singh:** *His government has stolen all the previous government's ideas but wrecked the integrated thinking that went behind them*

ance also starts slipping—like the Prime Minister's *topi* at a press conference!

**S**o much for the NF's "fresh thinking." Let's go on to the key divide: should the constitutional amendment be limited to a few matters like mandatory elections, or should it extend to the entire gamut of the responsibilities, powers, functions and finances of Panchayati Raj institutions and Nagarpalikas? The NF wants a limited constitutional amendment, with all matters of substance being relegated to "model guidelines." The Congress, on the other hand, holds that constitutional provisions are mandatory and enforceable, whereas guidelines, however modelled, are as enforceable as dress restrictions on Sridevi. Therefore, the Congress says, there must be the highest constitutional sanction for all matters relating to local bodies, especially their powers, functions and finances. Otherwise, elections may be held regularly but the elected local bodies will be left with little or nothing to do (which is exactly what happened, as detailed in the Asoka Mehta Committee Report—

the Bible of the National Front—after the initial "phase of ascendancy" of Panchayati Raj (1959 to 1964) during the "phase of stagnation" (1964 to 1969) and the "phase of decline" (1969 to 1977).

To get to the bottom of this controversy, we have to go back to the drafting of the Constitution. Mahatma Gandhi had insisted that *panchayats*—or self-reliant "village republics", as he called them—should be the foundation of our democracy. His last detailed statement on this was made in December 1947, doubtless with a view to signalling the Constituent Assembly of his desires. But, a month later, on 30 January, 1948, Gandhiji was assassinated. And those in charge of drafting the Constitution decided to put paid to such obsolete notions as "Panchayati Raj."

A feeble attempt by the president of the Constituent Assembly, Dr Rajendra Prasad, to revive interest in PR was brushed aside by the *babus* led by Sir Benegal N. Rau (law minister Ambedkar's Vinod Pande, shall we say?) as having been proposed too late in the day! It was left to a coterie of Madras Gandhian backbenchers—to

push through a brief, four-line clause in the Directive Principles of State Policy dealing with local self-government.

Tragically, Anantasayanam Ayyangar withdrew his draft in favour of Santhanam's, tragically because, while Santhanam saw *panchayats* as "units of self-government", Ayyangar had the vision to envisage them as instruments for "the effective decentralisation of political and economic powers."

And thus the legacy of Gandhiji lay buried as a minor throwaway line beneath a mountain of constitutional provisions for democracy in Parliament and the state Assemblies. Our founding fathers, perhaps unwittingly, bequeathed us a Constitution that provided for a remarkably enduring superstructure of democracy in Delhi and the state capitals but left it to the discretion of the states to build—or not build, as they willed—the foundations of our democracy in the villages and *bastis* where our people live. As it turned out, that was a faith completely misplaced. The states—with the notable exception of Gujarat and Maharashtra (and, in recent times, West Bengal, Andhra and Karnataka)—turned out to be the main saboteurs of PR. But I am running ahead of my story.

**T**o go back to where I was, the experience of the First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) brought home to Panditji that it would be impossible to deliver development to the grassroots without elected institutions of democratic self-governance at the grassroots. The Second Five-Year Plan, technically drafted by Professor Mahalanobis but politically rewritten



by Jawaharlal Nehru himself (in the days when Planning Commission chiefs were chosen for something rather more edifying than their expertise in telephone tapping and Prime Ministers for something rather more noble than their mastery of intrigue), was based on the recognition that "unless there is comprehensive village planning which takes into account the needs of the entire community, the weaker sections may not benefit sufficiently from assistance provided by government"

And the Balvantri Mehta Study Team (1957) put the case for Panchayati Raj so succinctly that it has never since been bettered "Development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community development can be real only when the community understands its problems, realises its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives, and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on the local administration." It, therefore, recommended "statutory elective local bodies and the devolution to them of the necessary resources, power and authority"

Panditji, with the zeal of a new convert, threw himself heart and soul into persuading the state governments (all of which, but Kerala, were then ruled by the Congress party) to convert the Balvantri Mehta recommendations into law, believing that the four-line Directive Principle of *panchayats* was constitutional sanction enough—and that state legislation, combined with sincerity of purpose on the part of state governments, could be relied on to do the rest

Following my sacred resolve to forestall apoplexy in the letter writers by quoting RG as little as possible, let me leave it to one of the great gurus of the Janata Dal, the aforementioned Asoka Mehta, to describe what state governments have done to Panchayati Raj. His report says that "except in Maharashtra and Gujarat (both, incidentally and significantly, Congress-run states for much of the last three decades), Panchayati Raj institutions have rarely been given an opportunity to take up planning or implementation work on a sizeable scale"; only "minuscule programmes are assigned to village panchayats"; "the essential idea that all development activities should flow only through the *panchayats* has lost ground"; development schemes are "kept outside the orbit" of the *panchayats*; "orders and direc-

tions by the State government have led to the gradual development of subsidiary legislation to curtail the decision-making powers of the elected bodies"; there has been a "tapering off of the allocation of Plan resources" to the *panchayats*, the quantum of "own resources" assigned to, or appropriated by, the *panchayats* has been "meagre"; "the vastness and growing complexity of development programmes has been used as an excuse for bypassing Panchayati Raj institutions"; there has been "a relative cooling off of enthusiasm (for Panchayati Raj) on the part of MPs and MLAs because they have perceived a threat to their position in the emerging Panchayati Raj leadership"; the bureaucracy has played "its own role in dissociating the Panchayati Raj institutions from the development process"; "worst of all, there is a lack of clarity in regard to the concept of Panchayati Raj itself and the objectives for which it should stand"

The Asoka Mehta Committee concluded "In sum, the activities of the Panchayati Raj institutions are meagre, their resource base weak, and the overall attention given them negligible"

**T**here could be no more damning indictment of what state governments have done to Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalikas. This is not a matter



**Vinod Pande:** His performance was razor-sharp when he had to answer to the former PM who was a stickler for precision. Now his performance, like the PM's topi, is also slipping

of partisan politics. If Congress governments have done outstanding PR work in Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Congress record in other states like UP and Bihar has been dismal. If CPI(M) governments have done well in West Bengal, there is nothing to particularly commend their record in Tripura and Kerala. As for the regional parties, the DMK and AGP constituents of the National Front rate a D minus although one would give an A to NTR and even to Ramakrishna Hegde (begging Bommai's pardon!). The fact of the matter is that it is that very echelon of our democracy—the second tier in the state capital—which, at present, is constitutionally responsible for building the third tier of democracy, but has, in most cases, demonstrated that it is also the echelon most responsible for teaching democratic decentralisation of all significance. For, note, there is a real conflict of interest, and a real battle over turf, between the state governments and the local bodies. This is the fundamental cause for Panchayati Raj not taking root and Nagarpalikas just withering away. What is the use of prescribing "model guidelines" to the very organs who have the greatest vested interest in not following the guidelines?

The National Front government has stolen all the previous government's ideas but wrecked the holistic, integrated thinking that went into the PR INP Bills. It has split the Congress Bills into a small enforceable constitutional amendment and a large unenforceable set of guidelines—the saddle and the stirrup are there but the horse has bolted. V P Singh's PR has everything to do with Public Relations and little to do with genuine Panchayati Raj. This is what happens when prejudice replaces policy and the desire to be different becomes the only principle of governance. We are faced with a muddle on PR/NP quite as grievous as this "government" of ours has got us into by trying to pursue a line different to the previous regime's on Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Tamil Nadu and the economy. Heaven help us—unless, indeed, it is already doing so by sending the Tau down to earth in the avatar of Kalki to smash the NF to smithereens!

*Yada yadahi dharmasya  
Glaney bhawati bhārata  
Abhauthana dharmasya  
Sambhavam yuge yuge!* ●

The views expressed in this column are those of its author and do not purport to constitute an official statement of the Congress party's position



# Friends again

*India and Nepal patch up their differences*



Heartiest congratulations are in order on the memorable rapprochement between this country and Nepal. The bitter feud lasting nearly two years, underscoring the irony that India could not get along with the world's only Hindu kingdom, could not have had a happier ending. The Janata Dal government has claimed credit for this "historic" achievement, as well it might. And eminently well-deserved praise has been showered on Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the first democratic Prime Minister of Nepal, even if an interim one, in 30 years. During the negotiations in New Delhi, he showed himself to be a man of goodwill, erudition and exceptional political skill.

However, when all is said and done, one point, which may not be popular these days, needs to be made: but for Rajiv Gandhi's Nepal policy during 1988 and 1989, the delightful denouement of the Indo-Nepalese drama just would not have been possible. Had Rajiv struck a deal with the royal regime—which was bound to be on terms far less favourable than have been agreed to now—there would not have been a democratic government in Nepal to parley with.

This is not my verdict but that of the supreme leader of Nepal's movement for the restoration of democracy, Ganesh Man Singh. According to him, a democratic Nepal has no reason to disregard Indian sensitivities or undermine Indian interests even while protecting Nepal's sovereignty.

The irony of it all is that many of the Janata Dal leaders and almost all the new ruling party's think-tanks were berating Rajiv for being "unfair" to Nepal. Some of these worthies even said that Rajiv had "alienated all Nepalese for all times". How ridiculous this magisterial pronouncement must look amidst the tidal wave of Indo-Nepalese goodwill.

The Janata Dal government has insisted that India's legitimate security interests in Nepal should be looked

after, which the Nepalese side has conceded gracefully. When Rajiv Gandhi was refusing to resile from the same demand, he was denounced as a "hegemonist". No wonder then that the coterie in the palace at Kathmandu was gleefully predicting that after the Indian elections, the "Maharaja and the Raja" would sweep away the Rajiv legacy and do a cosy deal. As it happened, autocracy itself has been swept away and Nepal is today a constitutional monarchy. Power now belongs to the Nepalese people, who may have their complaints against

Chinese arms offered to Nepal were much lower than those available from India.

While satisfaction, even deep satisfaction, over the bright new phase in India-Nepal relations is understandable, the kind of euphoria now being witnessed is wholly out of place. It ought to be reported that it was far from easy to reach the agreement that the two Prime Ministers eventually signed. According to a participant in the talks, "At times, it was a cliff-hanger". This was due not so much to Bhattarai's own predilections as to his



**K.P. Bhattarai (left) with V.P. Singh: memorable rapprochement**

New Delhi but have no ill-will against India.

There is no point going over the details of the Indo-Nepalese accord, which are by now well known. Suffice it to say that the basis for what the joint statement described as "friendly, unique and brotherly" relations has been clearly understood by both sides. It is significant that Bhattarai politely cancelled the last two instalments of Chinese arms ordered by the king and his minions in a fit of pique against India, before leaving for Delhi and not after his return home. But in Delhi he did raise the point that the prices of

need to watch the reaction back home. Above all, he was handicapped by the foot-dragging of some members of his own delegation.

V.P. Singh was visibly annoyed when a reporter suggested that the accord with Nepal was anti-China. Protection of legitimate Indian security interests does mean keeping out Chinese arms, except when imported with India's consent, but it is not an anti-Chinese act. Both India and Nepal are taking steps to reassure China about the benign nature of the renewed India-Nepal friendship. Nepal's need to do so is obviously greater.



# The up-market messiah

*Because the tap involves us all*

**"H**e is a vandal," Ramakrishna Hegde said of Subramaniam Swamy two years ago. "He is the kind of person who writes things on bathroom walls."

It was a put-down *par excellence* and one that no other Indian politician would ever have used. Not only did it manage to suggest that Swamy (who was then busy uncovering Hegde's land deals) was a closet-pervert, but it also had just the right note of middle-class disdain. While the likes of Devi Lal would have used four-letter words, Hegde had the refinement to recognise that contempt was infinitely more effective than plain abuse.

But then, R.K. Hegde's style is nothing if not up-market. Thirteen years ago when the Janata Party won the election, he arrived in Delhi from Bangalore and was appointed general secretary. While the party's other leaders lost themselves in internecine warfare, Hegde, complete with beard, shawl and packet of imported cigarettes, hit the 'opinion-makers' circuit.

At party after party, he would appear as the 'civilised politico', stopping to explain—between sips of a 12-year-old Scotch—what was *really* going on, while his audience oohed and aahed. By 1979, when Janata was on the verge of collapsing, he had attached himself to Chandra Shekhar but retained his place in this circuit—to the extent that a jealous rival even dubbed him the "kept politician of the Delhi elite".

Hegde shrugged off the insult, secure in the knowledge that his admirers were busy saying things like "if only more of these guys were like RK" or "at least he's one man you can talk to".

**IN 1983**, the loyalty to Chandra Shekhar paid off. When Janata earned the right to form a minority government in Karnataka (with BJP support), Shekhar insisted on making Hegde the chief minister even though he had played an insignificant role in the election campaign.

Such local leaders as S. Bangarappa objected but Hegde got the job anyway, despite the slur that he was no more than a cocktail party version of Chandra Shekhar. (Certainly, there are similarities in style and appearance between the two men, though Hegde is shorter and squatter.)

To his credit, he then demonstrated that he was a first-rate political manager. He kept his minority government going, despite a concerted effort by the Con-

gress(I) to topple him. Moreover, he toured Karnataka and built up a base for himself in a matter of months: soon, other state politicians were dwarfed by his stature.

More important, he declared that Karnataka's Janata experiment would demonstrate that there was an alternative to the Congress(I), despite the collapse of the 1977-79 Janata government at the Centre. If he did not invent the phrase 'value-based politics', he did his best to ensure that it entered the language.

Till early 1985, Hegde could do no wrong. When, against his expectations, the Congress swept the parliamentary elections in Karnataka, he did the decent thing and resigned. New elections were held for the Assembly and to everyone's surprise, Janata actually *increased* its share of the vote, finally winning a tangible majority.

**IN RETROSPECT** that was probably the beginning of the end. Till 1985, there had been credible Opposition leaders. Charan Singh was, after all, a former Prime Minister and Chandra Shekhar, after the success of his 1982 *padayatra*, had risen in prominence. But when the Congress(I) demolished the Opposition at the polls, both these leaders suddenly seemed like has-beens.

There was now a vacuum at the top of the Opposition and nobody was sure who would fill it.

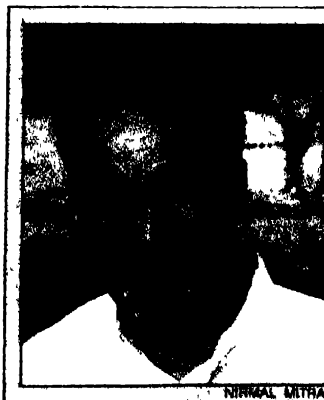
Hegde thought he knew the answer. Emboldened by the success of his Karnataka experiment, he believed that he was a credible future Prime Minister.

Consequently, he made two major mistakes. One, he antagonised Chandra Shekhar, his old mentor, who he now regarded as an irrelevance. And two, he

began to take Karnataka for granted, spending more and more time in Delhi.

Both errors came back to haunt him. Shekhar never forgave him for the betrayal, was appalled by his naked ambition and promptly set about destroying him at both the state and the national levels. In Bangalore, H.D. Deve Gowda raised the banner of revolt and in New Delhi, Subramaniam Swamy dug the boot in. Both were acting at Shekhar's behest.

Even if Shekhar had not launched his attack, Hegde's neglect of Karnataka had begun to anger those who once idolised him. The administration grew lax and uncaring and the state government began making money on deals—because, said the detractors, somebody had to pay for Hegde's national ambitions.

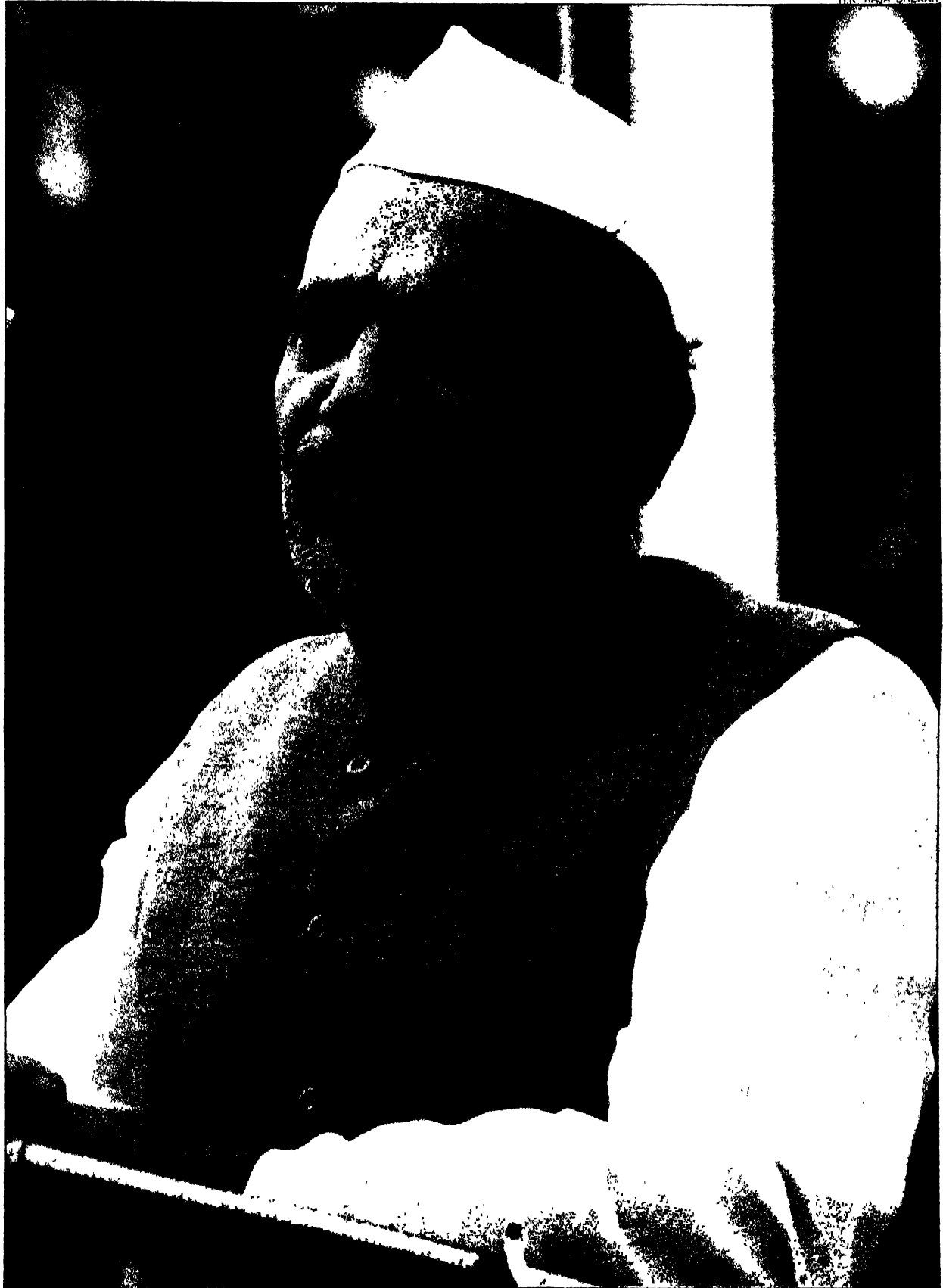


**One of Hegde's major mistakes was regarding Chandra Shekhar as an irrelevance. His former mentor never forgave him**

NIRMAL MITRA



H.K. RAJA SHEKAR





It was all a long way from value-based politics.

**AS THINGS** began to go wrong, Hegde reacted with panic. Terrified that Ajit Singh, who had been sent to Karnataka as a party observer, was actually a hit-man despatched by Shekhar, Hegde asked for transcripts of his phone conversations with Deve Gowda.

When he found one that suggested that the two men were conspiring against him, he promptly leaked it to the *Indian Express*, which gleefully frontpaged it.

It was a foolhardy move, unworthy of a man of Hegde's sophistication. Nobody who read the transcript was surprised that Ajit was in cahoots with Deve Gowda, but everyone was horrified that Hegde was tapping his colleagues' phones.

As the controversy mounted, Hegde tried to wriggle out of it by denying that he had ordered any telephone surveillance. The *Indian Express* was also forced to adopt a mendacious position because the tap involved them all—the paper claimed that central intelligence agencies had given it the transcript.

Once Subramaniam Swamy found documents proving that Hegde had, in fact, ordered lots of taps, the game was up. The former champion of value-based politics resigned as chief minister, still claiming, somewhat implausibly, that some policemen had ordered the taps without his knowledge.

By then, his credibility had taken a severe beating and in the months that followed, Swamy kept up the assault by digging up evidence of Hegde's complicity in numerous land deals. And while Hegde kept declaring his innocence, fewer and fewer people believed him.

**HEGDE WAS** now effectively finished as a national leader. But he still had two constituencies. The first was Karnataka. He conceded that he was no longer the idol of the people of his home state, but argued that he still retained an enormous amount of support. In fact, said his acolytes, had Hegde called an election after resigning, he would have swept the state.

This was a controversial view, but there was no denying that his other constituency was still intact.

Since the Janata collapse of 1979, Hegde had taken care to preserve his up-market base. He made it a point to court the press and to pay obeisance to those who regarded themselves as 'intellectuals'.

After he became chief minister of Karnataka, he set up a think-tank and invited many of these people to Bangalore to 'help contribute to the experiment'. Similarly, when he came to Bombay, he would take a suite at the Taj and invite his favourite editors over. Then, rather than lecturing them in the manner of most Indian politicians, he would ask their advice.

His critics said that he was still cultivating the cocktail party set, but this was unfair. Hegde's friends had more to them than that. Yes, they did go to cocktail parties, but once they got there, they spent their time

discussing things like the Narmada project. (It is no coincidence that Maneka Gandhi and Hegde struck up a close personal relationship around 1987.)

What Hegde was quick to recognise was that these were influential people with an interest in politics who, nevertheless, felt marginalised by the political process. The Gandhis were inaccessible and Devi Lal's table manners were such that he could never settle down to a quiet dinner with them.

So, Hegde was all they had. And sure enough, they clung to him as he clung to them.

**IF THE** last election proved anything, it demonstrated conclusively that Hegde was washed up in Karnataka. With that constituency gone, he was left with only his up-market friends.

Fortunately for Hegde, this is an important constituency. The Janata Dal is basically a collection of remnants of the 1977-79 Janata, some Congress defectors and a couple of newly prominent Jats.

It seems to be much more than that because it exudes an air of moral uprightness. While it is nobody's case that this aura is bogus, the fact remains that the press and the India International Centre-Rajpur Road crowd have done their bit to identify the Dal with all that is good and holy.

Recognising this important reality, V P Singh has continued to court this set with Padma Bhushans,

ministerships, ambassadorships and government jobs. (To its eternal shame, this crowd has hungrily lapped up these goodies.)

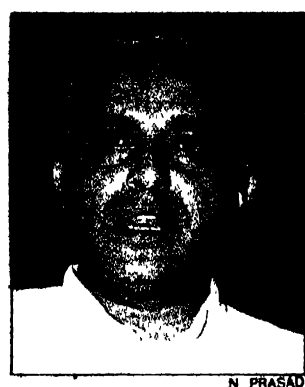
And who better to serve as the regime's liaison with the Centre for the Study of Developing Intellectuals set than its own hero: R K Hegde?

So, the Planning Commission has been turned into a club for the gang with Hegde as organising secretary. From India's point of view, this is not such a good idea. Economists continue to be appalled by the rubbish the Commission's 'intellectuals' keep coming up with. But from V.P. Singh's perspective, this is perfect: he has effectively silenced a powerful lobby that could have objected to his regime's failings.

It is a characteristic of this crowd that having assumed office, it forgets its former high-minded postures. Thus, Arun Shourie had to prod L.C. Jain into resigning over Meham and nobody in the Commission has even considered quitting over Narmada—an issue that should have set the agenda for this government.

And, because Hegde is among friends, he is not unduly perturbed by a parliamentary committee's conclusive finding that he had, in fact, ordered phone taps as Karnataka chief minister.

If he does quit, it won't be because he is following the dictates of his conscience. It will be because Devi Lal made him do so. ●



**Subramaniam Swamy's documents effectively finished Hegde as a national leader**

N PRASAD





ANISH GUPTA

# Fading glory

*The Tawang monastery is crumbling*

**T**he magnificent monastery at Tawang, in northern Arunachal Pradesh, is facing a threat. The three-hundred-year-old lamasery, the largest in Asia, is withering due to sheer neglect, as the Centre's initiative to preserve the ancient complex appears to have fizzled out.

Galden Namgyal Lhatse, popularly known as the Tawang monastery, is located just above Syho village in the district town of Tawang, about 150 kilometres away from the Indo-Tibetan border. The monastery, constructed by Mere Lodre Gyamtso in the mid-seventeenth century, was used by the Dalai Lama as a halting station after he fled Tibet and crossed over to India in March 1959.

As an old structure that has withstood the ravages of time for three centuries, the Tawang monastery demands constant maintenance and occasional renovation to prevent the ruination of its buildings and precious artefacts. Four major renovation projects were undertaken in the past—in 1809, 1855, 1882 and 1904. Unfortunately, throughout the present century, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which looks after the upkeep of ancient monuments of

national importance, kept the imposing monastery out of its purview till former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Tawang in March 1988. Impressed by the monastery's magnificence, Rajiv Gandhi directed the ASI to find ways to preserve the unique monument.

Responding to the Prime Minister's order, the ASI began work in real earnest. In August that year, an ASI team came to Tawang to assess the monastery's problems and another team of experts visited in October. Spurred by the activities on the part of the Centre, the state government also took certain initiatives. It formed a

high-powered committee, with the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh as its chairman, to monitor the renovation activities. Moreover, after the Union government announced the sanction of funds for the project, the state reciprocated by releasing an annual grant of Rs one lakh.

However, the official enthusiasm petered out within a short while. The committee formed by the state government met only once—in November 1988—and the ASI seemed to develop cold feet once Rajiv Gandhi lost

thing that is rarely found in the rest of the Buddhist world. There are also unusual specimens of Buddhist art and painting which form part of the monastery's priceless possessions.

It is these artefacts that are facing the gravest threat. The manuscripts have become vulnerable to insects and decay and the paintings have suffered some degree of bio-degradation caused by microbes and spores settling on their surface.

While nature is taking its toll, the lamas, who live in the monastery, are



ANISH GUPTA

Manuscripts preserved in the monastery library: valuable collection

interest in the matter. Except for some minor patch work being undertaken, nothing extensive was done.

The monastery is a sprawling complex comprising a temple, a prayer hall, a library, a common kitchen and the living quarters of the monks. *Dukhang*, the *sanctum sanctorum* of the monastery, houses huge images of the Buddha and Palden Lhamol, the presiding deity. The monastery is, however, more famous for its *par-khang* or the library, which has a precious collection of manuscripts of books like the *Tangur*, *Kanghyur* and *Sungbhum*. Many of these manuscripts are embossed in gold—some-

no less responsible for the deterioration of the complex. Not only are the monastery's *objet d'art* threatened by neglect, but the cultural and religious atmosphere of the institution, too, has been degraded. Western pop and Hindi film songs blare from the monks' quarters and it is said that even clandestine screenings of blue films are sometimes arranged on the monastery premises. According to sources in the state capital, the attention of the abbot was drawn to this state of affairs on several occasions, but no corrective measures have yet been taken. •

**Rabjit Chowdhury/Itanagar**



# Rain or sunshine?

*Weather forecasting is no more a guessing game with the supercomputer Cray XMP*

**I**t is a strange three-piece contraption—sparkling red in colour—that looks like a giant sofa set. It lives and breathes in a habitat of its own—a dim-lit room in Delhi's Mausam Bhavan, where the silence is disturbed only by the whirr of airconditioners. Described as a wonder machine, the supercomputer Cray XMP, which was acquired after prolonged negotiations from America, is busy fulfilling a dire need: making ten-day weather forecasts. And the country's meteorologists have never been as accurate before.

With a phenomenal memory of some two mega (million) bytes, the XMP is said to be the "most powerful system available at this point of time". (But given the rate at which computers are rendered obsolete, this statement might not hold good a few years from now.) Besides, the supercomputer has a large mainframe memory, equally effective secondary memory and an ability to do thousands of calculations together with precision. The wonder machine can be put to countless other uses as well. Only two US and three Japanese firms manufacture supercomputers of this kind.

Why were the Indian authorities so keen on acquiring such a costly supercomputer for weather prediction? Surely, weather forecasts are vital for a country which depends almost entirely on the rains for a good harvest. Weather forecasts are broadly divided into three categories: short-range forecasts covering the next 24 to 72 hours, medium-range predictions which tell what the weather will be between three and ten days, and, long-range forecasts valid after ten days. The most important of these are medium-range forecasts. "We need the supercomputer for medium-range forecasts, because it can do a large number of calculations, simultaneously, in a very short time," says the secretary to the ministry of science and technology, Dr Vasant Gowarikar.

Medium-range weather forecasts have for a long time been a problem area for the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). Reliable weather forecasts valid for 24-28 hours have been available to farmers over the last few decades. These are based partly on the forecaster's skill and guidance from limited area numerical weather prediction (NWP) models. But though short-range forecasts are useful for

certain applications, farmers in a country like India need more time to react to predictions and take necessary precautions. That is what makes medium-range forecasts—three to ten days in advance—vital. If farmers could be warned three or more days in advance about the measures they should adopt, experts believe agricultural output could be increased and recurring losses minimised.

**The Cray XMP at Delhi's Mausam Bhavan: a wonder machine**





Says R.K. Datta, project coordinator of the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), "Compared to short-range weather forecasts, which can be handled by limited area models, medium-range forecasting involves the use of global circulation models." Naturally, with the parameters so wide, the number of calculations which have to be done is much greater. What is even more difficult is making medium-range predictions for a "tropical monsoon regime".

**B**ut the need for accurate medium-range forecasting was not felt until 1983. In April-May that year, unusual and persistent cloudy weather in the north-west affected the wheat cultivation. The then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, wanted meteorologists to examine the problem carefully and evolve a way for adjusting cropping

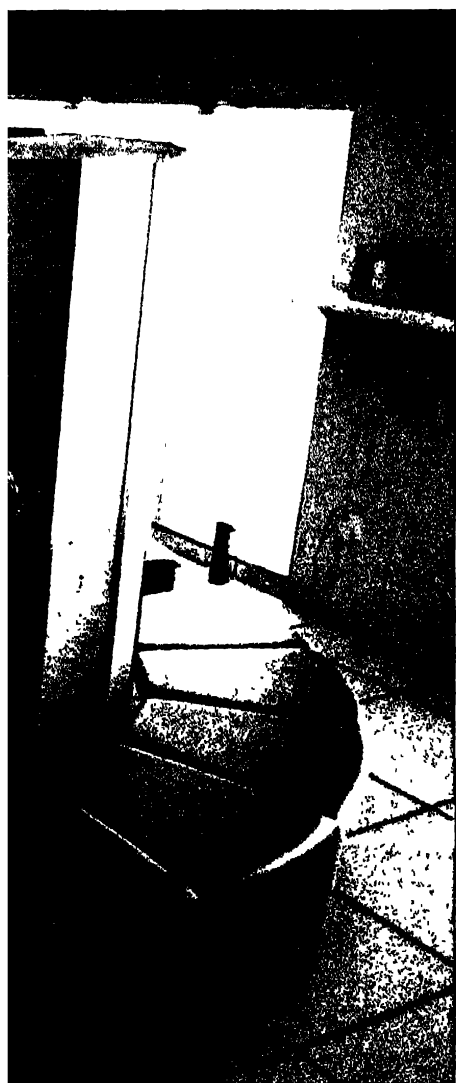
patterns to suit weather conditions. An expert committee headed by Prof Yash Pal was formed which conducted a survey in this regard. It found that weather-based agro-advisories were necessary to step up agricultural production and also pointed out that medium-range weather forecasts were vitally important. Eventually, the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting and Development of Agro-meteorological Advisory Services came up in the Eighties.

The method used for medium-range forecasts is called the numerical weather prediction (NWP) technique. According to this, the behaviour of the atmosphere can be represented and governed by physical laws. And these laws can be expressed in mathe-

vital to the survival of crops. But scientists feel weather predictions are not enough. What Indian farmers need is an action plan for separate regions, districts and smaller areas in terms of the operations a farmer should carry out to suit projected climate conditions.

The Cray XMP can be used for such agro-meteorological forecasts, and more. It is of immense value in industrial designing, nuclear physics, graphics, cartoon films, aircraft and automobile designing as well. Think of a problem that needs trillions of instructions which an ordinary computer

**With a phenomenal memory of some two mega (million) bytes, the Cray XMP supercomputer is said to be the most powerful system available at this point of time**



matical equations relating to horizontal motion, dry air, conservation of moist air, thermodynamics and surface pressure etc, collectively called atmospheric equations. A computer, to solve these equations, would need a memory of over four million words and a large auxiliary memory as well. Says Datta: "With the time step taken to be approximately 12 minutes, a ten-day forecast would need 1,200 steps and solving all equations at each grid point means about 10 to the power of 13 operations."

Weather forecasts in India are normally made for an area of 10,000 sq kms. But the farmer wants information specific to his region in addition to what a normal forecast provides. For instance, if he is growing a vine crop, or if his wheat is at an early stage, he would worry about frost. In April, when his wheat crop is ready for harvest, he would like to know if there will be sunshine or a duststorm in order to plan his reaping schedule. In Rajasthan, where there is very little rainfall, the timely prediction of rain is

would take days, even months, to solve. The designing of an automobile, for example. Engineers would build a number of prototypes and test them out to arrive at an optimum design. The supercomputer, however, does all this by simulating various designs in the form of mathematical equations and finally arriving at an optimum design without the trouble of building prototypes. The same principle can be used to arrive at efficient designs of aircraft, missiles and satellites. As Datta points out, "The machine can, through complex graphics, tell you how a car or an aircraft will crash—so that you can modify the design to cause minimum damage and get maximum efficiency." Supercomputers also have their uses in oil exploration, fluid dynamics and electronic design.

With the arrival of the supercomputer, science has at last come to the rescue of the Indian farmer and the industrialist. And its installation and use is a big step forward for India. • **Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi**





## Portrait of a 75 year old



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# Waiting for Rs 1,000



*The government announces a new package to rehabilitate victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. But is it enough?*

**F**or the residents of Delhi's Tilak Vihar, the traumatic memories of the November 1984 riots, which left over 3,000 people dead and many more injured in the wake of a fierce backlash against the Sikhs following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, are yet to be forgotten. Even today, the "widows of 1984," as they are called, relate stories of how their near and dear ones were brutally hacked to death in front of them. So far, their families have survived on the Rs 400 pension that was sanctioned by government. Of course, local gurudwara committees chipped in with grants.

But that was hardly enough. Often, the riot victims agitated demanding more but their voices were rarely

heard. Finally, the new government has come up with a package to rehabilitate the riot-affected families, all of whom have been resettled in Tilak Vihar by the previous regime. Under this scheme, announced by the minister of state for home, Subodh Kant Sahay, in the beginning of June, the Rs 400 pension has been increased to Rs 1,000. And, every school-going child who was affected by the violence will receive a monthly stipend of Rs 50 while the grant for every college student is Rs 100. The new package, the minister said, would cover 310 families in all.

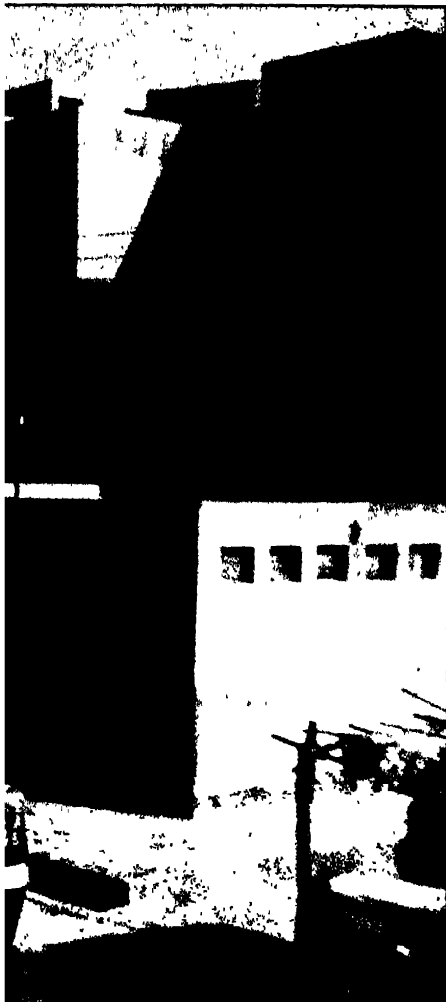
For the women of Tilak Vihar, however, the hike in pension rates is meaningless unless they start getting the money. All of them react to the government's gesture with barely con-

cealed disbelief. They admit that the additional money will make life a little easier, but they refuse to concede that the windfall will come to them without a fight.

The years have taken their toll. The riot victims have certainly seen the worst. But then life has hardly changed. Amidst the filth and squalor of Tilak Vihar, they struggle for survival, trying desperately to make both ends meet. However, they take everything stoically.

"It sounds good, but the question is, will we get it at all? The new pension scheme should have been implemented from 15 March, but we haven't got any money yet," says Devinderjeet, whose husband and eldest son were killed in the riots. Illiterate and never having worked before, she now





**Delhi's Tilak Vihar: life is difficult for the residents**

supports her family of six children on the Rs 400 pension she gets from the government and the grants given by the various gurdwara committees in the area. She supplements her income by doing tailoring at the resource centre, opposite her house.

That's how life is for most of the families in Tilak Vihar. They all have endless complaints against the government: the many hours they have spent in getting their cheques, their allotment numbers, the shops and the jobs.

While the administration has made honest efforts to rehabilitate the victims, they have obviously not been good enough. It doled out a meagre Rs 20,000 for each person killed in the riots and Rs 500 to Rs 2,000 to those injured. For property damages, the government had sanctioned Rs 10,000 for "total damage" and Rs 2,000 to Rs 5,000 for "partial damage". A measly amount, considering that victims of the Bhagalpur riots were given Rs 1.25

lakh as compensation, says Atma Singh of the All India Sikh Conference, which runs the "November 1984 riots victims camp".

**T**he administration's major contribution towards rehabilitation, however, were the tenements at Tilak Vihar. According to an official, altogether 2,057 flats have been allotted to the riot-affected families—mostly widows. The government paid the initial amount of Rs 3,000 from the Prime Minister's relief fund. The rest of the money was to be paid by the occupants in instalments over the "next ten to 15 years".

This has led to a lot of resentment among the widows. While the Delhi Development Association (DDA) has started sending letters asking for money, the women are determined not to pay up. "It is utterly ridiculous. We hardly have money to survive. Why don't they just tell us where we can get the money from," says an irate Agyavanti, who supports her family of five by doing odd jobs.



**A classroom in one of the flats: the children face an uncertain future**

With all the flat holders deeply in the red, the administration is now seriously considering two options: rescheduling the instalments, or, waiving the entire sum. "This is a tricky situation. It will be difficult to initiate prosecution proceedings against them. Moreover, we are gradually discovering that some of the original allottees have sold off their flats under power of attorney. So how can we take any action against them?" asks an official.

There are other areas as well in which the government has made contributions to rehabilitate the riot-affected families. It has already spent Rs 5.45 lakhs on the marriage of the widows and their daughters. So far, elaborates an official, 163 weddings

have taken place in Tilak Vihar. The administration also claims to have secured bank loans and jobs for the members of the colony. The government, of course, made significant concessions in employment norms by waiving two essential requirements: the age factor and the mandatory registration with an employment exchange.

But are these measures enough? Not really, considering that most of the people are starting their livelihood from scratch. True, they have all got houses and jobs, but compared to what they had prior to the riots, the government's largesse is far inadequate and inferior. Take this example. The administration has allotted a large number of shops to the riot victims in Tilak Vihar itself. But, since money is scarce in the locality, there is very little selling. Most of the shop-keepers sit idle.

There is yet another problem that the Tilak Vihar residents are facing. Though the government's package sounds fine, the people have to go

**T**hough the government has done precious little to help the riot victims, most of the families have not lost faith in it

around for months before they are finally given their dues. An inevitable fallout of the country's bureaucratic procedures.

But most of the families have not lost faith in the government. The memories of 1984 are still haunting them, they have no one to fall back upon except the administration. "Hume is sarkar pe pura bharosa hai (I have full faith in this government)," say most of the widows, even though they point out that it has done precious little to help them. Many of them do not even believe that the government has increased their pension to Rs 1,000. "Let us first get it," they said. •

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**





# HOMELESS

*Punjab's refugees: neglected in New Delhi,  
they are worse off when resettled in  
their home state*

When thousands of refugees from Punjab arrived in Delhi soon after the terrorist upsurge of 1984-85, the story was front-paged in every national newspaper of repute. Five years later, the refugees continue to come to the capital, but such is the ennui the Punjab problem generates, that nobody takes much note of them. No, not even the authorities—even though the latest round of migrations have taken place from such parts of the state as were generally considered trouble-free.





The Moga-Mudki-Jira belt, for instance, where terrorist attacks were unknown only a few years ago. Now the militants have strengthened their hold in this area and strike with impunity. The Hindus react in the only way open to them; they move out, and fast. Madan Lal, among the latest batch of refugees who left Moga around two months ago, estimates that only 10 per cent of the 50 per cent Hindu population is left in his district.

A butcher by trade, Madan Lal (55) was one of the victims of the austerity drive (no meat, no alcohol, no cigarettes) launched by the terrorists

in 1988. "They had given me several warnings to shut down my shop or else... Sometimes they would take away all the money I had in the cash box," he recounts.

Nonetheless, Madan Lal stuck it out, loath to leave the only home he had ever known. Until 35 Hindus were massacred in a bus travelling down a road close to his house. This was the proverbial last straw. Lal decided it was time that he joined the list of 16,000 Punjabi refugees who had sought shelter in Delhi. On arrival in the capital, the Lal family was guided to Peeraghari, the largest refugee camp in Delhi, with over 1,500 families in residence.

The first influx into Peeraghari had been of refugees from the Amritsar, Ferozepur and Batala areas, with 3,000 families being allotted one-room quarters in the sprawling transit camp. Once the rooms were all taken up, the Delhi administration began distributing tents—one each for a family of ten members. But, by the time Madan Lal and his companions from Moga arrived even the free tents had been exhausted.

The few hundred rupees that Madan Lal had managed to carry with him while fleeing Punjab were spent on buying second-hand tents. The other refugees managed as well as they could. But even two months after they first arrived in Delhi, the authorities continued to act as if they didn't exist. Let alone grant them the dole that was being given to the ones who arrived earlier, the administration ignored them completely. Laments Madan Lal: "In 1947 I had run away from Lahore to escape the Hindu-Muslim clashes and set up a meat shop in Moga. Now the militants have

forced me to leave home again."

Others had similar heart-rending tales to tell. But the Delhi administration took little notice of their plight.

**T**he ongoing migration from Moga district gives the lie to the story put out by the government that things were rapidly improving in rural Punjab. And that the Hindus settled in refugee camps in Delhi were moving back to their homes. In early June, Doordarshan gave prominent coverage to the return of 400 families to Punjab, with the rider that normalcy was fast returning to the state. But the truth of the matter was quite different.

These refugee families had staged a week-long *dharna* at the Boat Club lawns some time ago, hoping that the authorities would take cognisance of their complaints. Finally the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took up cudgels on their behalf.

According to BJP MP, Madan Lal Khurana, these families had left Punjab immediately after Operation Bluestar. At that time, the number of refugees was so large that a number of camps were set up all over Delhi to accommodate them. The biggest camp was at Peeraghari, but several smaller ones sprung up at Jahangirpuri, Mongolpuri and near Panchkuiyan Road. The inmates were promised free accommodation and a monthly dole of Rs 1,000 per family.

The rehabilitation scheme was well-conceived but ill-executed. The promised relief was too long in coming and in frustration some refugees petitioned the Supreme Court. In the court order that followed, a relief package was worked out. The judges recommended that, instead of being put up in camps in the capital, the refugees



**MADAN LAL**  
(Second from right)

**"In 1947, I had run away from Lahore to escape the Hindu-Muslim clashes and set up a meat shop in Moga. Now the militants have forced me to leave home again"**

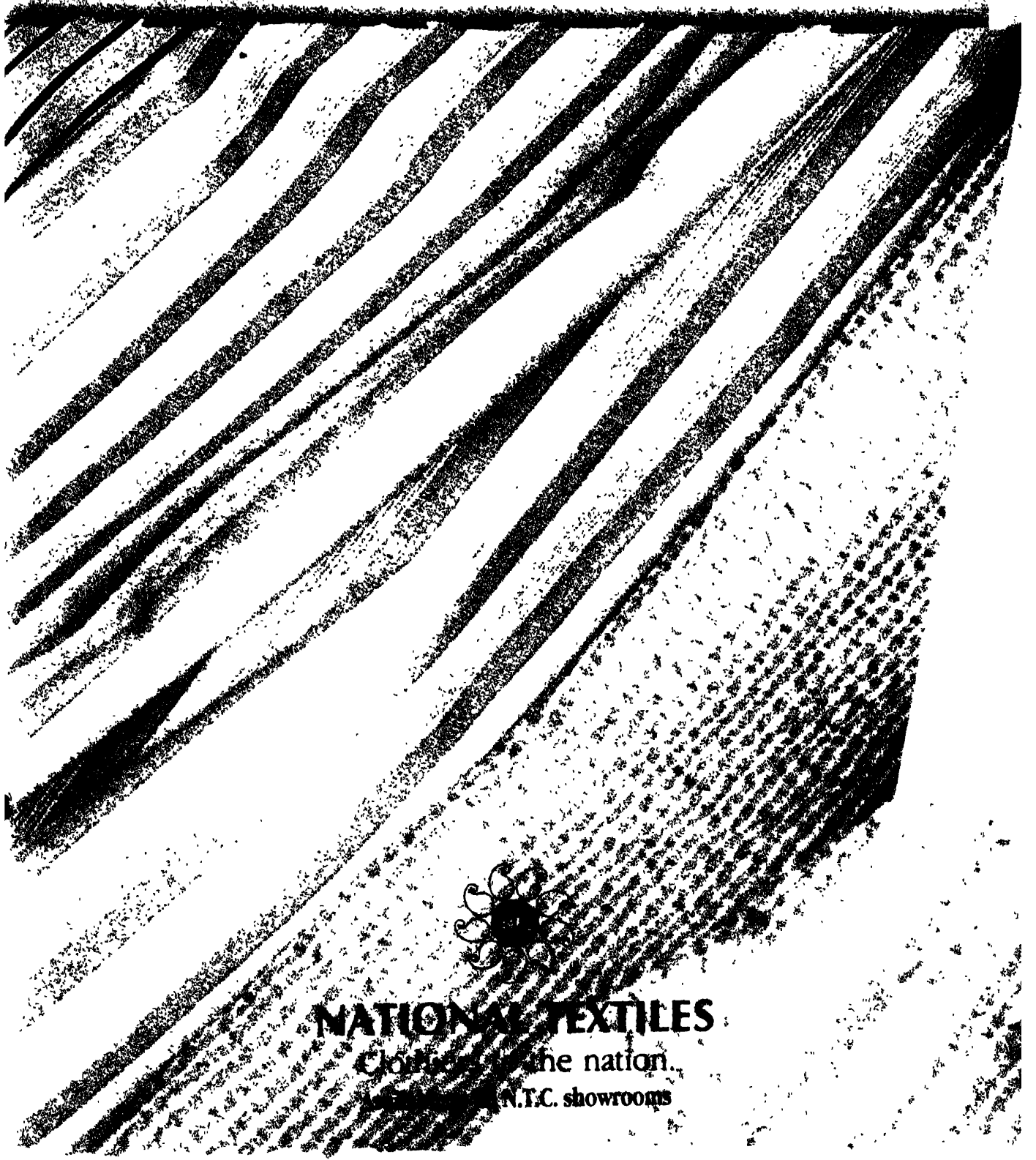






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should ideally be rehabilitated in the "safer" cities of Punjab. The court also asked the central government to grant a loan of Rs 25,000 to each family and additional relief worth Rs 7,500.

The 400 families (earlier resident at the Boat Club lawns) were asked to move to a hastily-renovated transit camp in Pathankot, a Hindu-majority town bordering Jammu and Kashmir. Adequate security arrangements were made for them, but even after a two-year-long wait, nothing was heard of the loan and the relief that had been recommended by the Supreme Court. So, in 1990, the refugees retraced their steps and landed in the capital once again.

Says Khurana: "We were very happy with the verdict of the Supreme

It remains to be seen, however, whether the displaced lot become victims of bureaucratic delay once again.

**T**he government propaganda notwithstanding, the number of people who actually go back to Punjab is negligible. With an average of 10 killings a day, the law and order situation in the state shows no signs of improving. And with the militant threat growing more ominous, the majority community is slowly moving out, with no intentions of ever coming back. For, as Raghubir Sharma, a former resident of Amritsar explains, the families who return are victimised by the terrorists. "We even heard that two of the persons who went to Pathankot at the government's bidding were killed as soon as they got off

Amritsar, was among the lucky ones, getting off lightly in two armed encounters with the militants. In one incident, his family was attacked by eight terrorists. The army eventually came to their rescue, but not before his father was seriously injured. Then in 1985, his brother and he were attacked as they were returning from their fields. His brother succumbed to his injuries and Kalia was divested of the Rs 75,000 he had been carrying.

This was enough to make Kalia abandon his flourishing career as a commission agent and leave his home. He says, "Of the 500 Hindu families in our village, there are only 25-30 left. And most of them are living disguised as Sikhs."

Once in Delhi, Jagmohan Kalia was appointed president of the Peeraghar relief camp, but he admits that he has been able to do little for his fellow-refugees. "Only unemployed families are supposed to get the Rs 1,000 allowance. So, even if we lock our rooms for an hour to go somewhere, and there is a checking in that period, we are liable to lose it. There is no employment for us. We are like prisoners here," he complains.

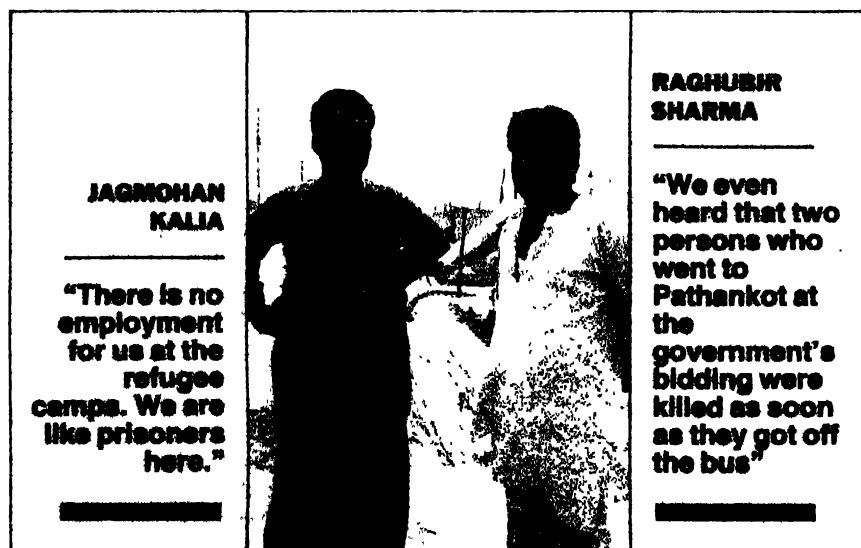
Neelam Thakur's family—like thousands of other petty Hindu traders—was a victim of extortion and constant death threats. Thakur, who now lives in a night-shelter on Panchkuiyan Road, recalls: "Almost every other day they would demand money for *kar seva*. Our children could not go to school. I could not go to the bazaar."

But things weren't much better in Delhi, either. Though, of course, the authorities claim to have their own constraints. There has been a large exodus of people from Kashmir and relief has to be organised for them as well. Officials of Delhi administration allege that several among the refugees continue to do their jobs in Punjab, coming back to Delhi once a month to collect their allowance.

Such allegations notwithstanding, nobody seriously disputes the fact that the conditions in the Delhi refugee camps are abysmal. Cramped and unhygienic quarters are a far cry from the prosperous homes these families left back in Punjab. Nobody doubts, also, that these refugees would go back almost immediately if their security was guaranteed.

But nobody knows just how long that would take—never mind the government propaganda. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



**JAGMOHAN KALIA**

**"There is no employment for us at the refugee camps. We are like prisoners here."**

**RAGHUBIR SHARMA**

**"We even heard that two persons who went to Pathankot at the government's bidding were killed as soon as they got off the bus."**

Court because by fleeing Punjab the Hindus are fulfilling the dreams of the militants." According to the MP, while the Delhi administration and the central government had turned a blind eye to the refugees' problems, the BJP had organised immediate relief for them. "All the victims of the 1984 riots in Delhi had been rehabilitated. So, why not the Punjab refugees? This does not mean that I oppose compensation to not victims. But why this discrimination?" he asks.

But Khurana's indignation notwithstanding, the refugees were back to square one in 1990. But the BJP pressured the government into announcing a new package. This time the refugees were given the train fare to Pathankot, Rs 5,000 as relief and a monthly payment of Rs 300 as rent was promised. And news of their departure was telecast to the nation.

the bus," he says.

While such horror stories may not necessarily be true they affect the refugees considerably. Most of them have had close brushes with the militants, lost property worth lakhs and abandoned their business establishments under duress. Raghubir Sharma, who was a police constable, says, "I have not had the guts to go back even once."

With reason. In 1984 Sharma was guarding Punjab MLA Harbans Lal Khanna when the terrorists struck. Khanna and two of his securitymen were killed on the spot, while Sharma escaped with a single bullet injury. But the constable's confidence was badly shattered and the next day he, along with his family, took the train to Delhi.

Jagmohan Kalia, a refugee from Naushehra Panuan village, near



INTERVIEW

# "I am against monopoly"

*Union minister Ajit Singh on the new industrial policy*

*Ajit Singh has a problem. As India's progressive industry minister, he wants to liberalise, introduce competition and bring in foreign investment. But at the same time, he has to strike a balance with his ministerial colleagues, who mostly spout socialistic jargon and push for ill-planned "pro-poor" policies. Singh's industrial policy reflects the dilemma. He met SUNDAY's Ritu Sarin in New Delhi last week, to discuss the policy, its background, and the future. Excerpts from the interview.*

**SUNDAY:** The Janata Dal government had promised a radically different industrial policy. Are there any major shifts from the policies followed by the previous government?

**Ajit Singh:** There are basically two things. The first is for the small scale industries—we have given them more facilities, and increased the limit for ancillary as well as for the regular small scale units. For the medium scale industries, we have freed them from many government controls. The idea is to change the idea that our industries are not competitive, the quality of products is not good, and one of the reasons for this is the delay caused because of the government's rules. The government has been deciding what entrepreneur, in which district and what location will produce what. Now, I think the time has come for the entrepreneurs to decide for themselves. There will be much less red tape. Also, it will be much easier for foreign technical collaborations and foreign investments now.

**Q:** This is quite similar to the 'fast channel' scheme conceived by Rajiv Gandhi, isn't it?

**A:** The fast channel basically said that you go through all the regulations but the secretaries would meet quickly and decide cases. We have said you don't come to us—you (entrepreneurs) can create your fast track wherever you want to. There is a lot of difference in the two concepts. If you say you will do things faster it never works. One member of the committee can get a decision deferred. There are no questions asked. Look at what we have done. We have done away with the Foreign Investment (FI) Committee. We have done away with the Capital Goods Committee. We have done away with the registration scheme and so many other schemes.

**Q:** This will take away a lot of controls from the bureaucrats. Has there been







**“Bureaucratic changes keep taking place and it has nothing to do with me. I have nothing in favour or against him (Montek Singh Alluwalia) coming here”**

**any resentment against the policy?**

**A:** Yes. Naturally there will be. In many ministries, people have realised that they will not be deciding. But, there was a lot of discussions at the ministerial level and there is no major problem. There was a lot of support (for the new industrial policy) from the Prime Minister.

**Q: I believe major changes were made in the original (policy) draft thanks to suggestions from the Prime Minister and some of your Cabinet colleagues. That, for instance, (finance minister) Madhu Dandavate wanted a more socialistic tilt in the policy. Is this true?**

**A:** Not really. Some minor changes were made after talking to everyone but basically, it has gone through as we conceived it. People say these things because Madhu has a socialistic background. Otherwise he was very cooperative and pragmatic. He does not have any ideological hang-ups.

**Q: Was there any dissent?**

**A:** We only talk about what has been decided, not about the process of decision-making. As I said, the industrial policy evolved over two-three months. In the process, we spoke to the Economic Affairs Committee, the Trade Investment Committee, the PM and his advisers, the Planning Commission and various organisations like FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce). Maybe not in its exact form, but the policy has been under discussion for a long time.

**Q: Was there pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party to accelerate industrialisation and liberalisation?**

**A:** Not really. There was more pressure for the statehood of Delhi.

**Q: One of the criticisms of the policy is that it is sketchy and ambiguous. Are we to expect a second and clearer instalment?**

**A:** Now that the policy has been approved, we will frame the rules. Like we announced the sugar policy but still have to work out many of its aspects. Here, we still have the CCI&E (the Chief Controller of Imports and Exports). We do want the industry to intimate to us what their investments are, for statistical purposes. We do not know what the overall impact of the policy will be and we have to monitor the feedback. All that has to be worked out.

**Q: You talked about incentives to small and medium-sized industries. What about the large scale sector? The policy is curiously silent about their liberalisation. Why?**

**A:** The same liberalisation trend will help all of them. Even when the large houses set up new industries within these investment limits, they too will skip all these hassles. They still are subject to MRTP (Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices) laws, but up till now they have been going through all the other drills and then the MRTP drill. We have stated clearly in the document that these changes are applicable to MRTP companies but MRTP and FERA (Foreign Exchange Regulation Act) laws still apply to them.

**Q: In keeping with the Janata Dal's policies, the MRTP-FERA regulations were expected to become more stringent. Is this in the offing?**

**A:** We have not changed anything in MRTP and FERA. These companies will function as they function now. What we want to do is strengthen the unfair trade practices part of the MRTP and FERA laws. We believe bigness *per se* is not bad. The impression that MRTP gives is that bigness is bad and we want to do away with that.





impression and have more strict laws on monopolies, unfair practices etc. We will not allow anyone to violate the laws. Liberalisation does not mean we will give people a free hand. But, that we are going to clamp down on big houses is not true. I am not against big houses. I am against monopoly because that leads to higher prices and bad quality of products and goes against competition. These companies should not dominate a market for any product.

**Q: In which areas of industry would you like to break the monopolies?**

**A:** That is a very general question. I don't know where the monopolies are yet.

**Q: Will you be releasing a negative, or restricted list of companies soon?**

**A:** There is a big book which will have both the lists—the positive list where you are allowed (to skip procedures) and the negative list where you will have to go through the current procedures. That is what we are working on now and we have to interact with all the ministries for it. The small scale sector will come in because there are some reserve items which we cannot open up. We will have to examine the list case by case.

**“...Madhu has a socialistic background. Otherwise he was very cooperative and pragmatic (about the policy). He does not have any ideological hang-ups”**



**Q: As far as the foreign investment policy is concerned, were you under pressure because of the Super 301 issue?**

**A:** Not really. We had to go by our own perceptions and conditions in India and we have been talking about liberalisation long before Super 301 became an issue here. That had nothing to do with it (the policy).

**Q: There is not much in the policy about the public sector or the privatisation. Why?**

**A:** We have promised to come out with a white paper on public enterprises. It will all be there. We are still

working on it.

**Q: In your opinion, have all the promises made by the National Front in its election manifesto in the area of industrialisation been fulfilled?**

**A:** The manifesto said there will be an emphasis on employment-generating, agro-based and small-scale industries. But you must realise that in the small-scale sector, the state plays a very important role. Many rules and regulations are made by the state and we are calling a meeting of all the state ministers sometime next month. In that area the government can only give incentives, which we have done. We have formed a bank for them also, because their problems are credit, raw material and the markets.

**Q: The environment lobby in the country is gradually getting stronger and the minister of state for environment and forests Maneka Gandhi has generally been taking an anti-industry stance. Did this affect the framing of the policy in any way?**

**A:** The laws are still the same but certainly, people have become more aware (of the environment). What we have done in the industrial policy is that in some large cities, within 25 kms of the periphery, you cannot set up any polluting industry. Other than that, we have left it to the states. But whether it is dams, power generation or industrial politics, it all has to be balanced very carefully. We want clean water, clean air but we want some bread also.

**Q: There have been reports that joint secretary of the PM's office, Montek Singh Alluwalla is coming in as industry secretary. Is this true?**

**A:** I don't know. Bureaucratic changes keep taking place and it has nothing to do with me. I have nothing in favour or against him coming here. •

**“The idea is to change the idea that our industries are not competitive, the quality of products is not good, and one of the reasons for this is the delay caused because of the government's rules”**





## COMPANIES

# Time's up

*The Larsen & Toubro board could be in trouble over unconverted debentures, restive investors and a tough legal position*

**L**arsen & Toubro is in a difficult position. The Bombay-based engineering and electronics company has the money, but it claims that there are no projects to use it for. At least that is what D N. Ghosh, the company's new chairman, would like the world to believe.

On 30 April, Ghosh, who took over as chief after Dhirubhai Ambani stepped down as chairman in March, decided not to call in the Rs 820 crores Larsen & Toubro (L&T) cleaned up in a convertible debenture issue last year. Instead, he passed the buck to the Controller of Capital Issues (CCI) in New Delhi, the same agency which had cleared the issue at a time when Ambani was overlord of the company, of the corporate world, and much of Delhi.

The new chairman's move is being interpreted as yet another ploy to deny Ambani under the new dispensa-

tion. If the convertible part of the issue were to be converted from debentures to equity, Ambani and his family, who already hold 25 per cent of L&T equity, would gain the most. They subscribed heavily in the L&T issue, and this would merely give them more shareholding clout, something the present government is dead against. And Ghosh, who was virtually thrust on the board by the financial institutions—therefore, the government—is said to be playing along.

However, Ghosh denies he has done anything at all. "I came in as chairman with my hands tied," he says. "On the one hand, the IDBI (Industrial Development Bank of India), which is the monitoring authority, directed L&T not to call for the money on 30 April. And on the other, the ICICI (Industrial Credit & Investment Corp. of India) said that L&T should go ahead with the conversion

without changing the terms spelt out in the (issue) prospectus." ICICI are trustees for the issue. Corporate legal experts are of the opinion that IDBI has no authority to pass on a "no call" instruction, as it is only a monitor of the issue funds and cannot decide for L&T what it should do with its money.

Either way, Ghosh is stuck. If he goes ahead and calls in the money from banks, or clears the debenture conversions, he is bound to receive flak from the finance ministry, which has turned from being heavily pro-Ambani to one of the Gujarati business family's worst enemies. And if Ghosh holds back, then the estimated 12 lakh L&T shareholders, who are already restive, would be terribly upset. After all, it is public money that is being played around with.

And the problem just gets worse. Last fortnight, the CCI wrote to Ghosh saying that it was not for them to take a decision on conversion, the company's board should figure it out. If necessary, said the CCI, after the board decides on the matter, it could come to it for advice and clarifications. The next L&T board meeting, due on 6 July, is crucial. The board is getting together to discuss annual accounts, but a major part of that accounting could be to the government and shareholders.

For one, a conversion has never been deferred in such a way. L&T officials, who decline to be identified, say that the board has no option but to allow conversion. Ghosh, according to



**"On the L&T board, Dhirubhai and Mukesh Ambani stepped down," said finance minister Madhu Dandavate. "With this, the government's role in the whole affair is over"**





them, is trying to think of a way out, to convert the debentures without giving the Ambanis a stronger foothold in the company. This is virtually impossible without taking some very unusual steps.

According to L&T executives, a way out that Ghosh and his masters are thinking about is to return the money collected from the L&T issue to investors, with interest. Investors, however, may not be too happy if this were to happen. They want a share in the company, whether it is to bank their confidence with the firm, or to speculate in the capital markets when they get the shares in their hands. Besides, the L&T prospectus promised them "compulsory and automatic conversion" of debentures into equity, and if an investor wishes, he can create legal problems for the company. A group of investors are already thinking on these lines. 23 May was the conversion day, they say, and as far as they are concerned, they are shareholders from that day.

The investors have a point. Besides, they have Supreme Court decisions to back up their claim. The court permitted allotment of debentures last December, and it may be too late now to change things. Says a senior financial institution official, who declines to be identified: "The egg has been scrambled. You cannot unscramble it now." He adds, "At least, it will not be practical." Says a Bombay corporate lawyer, who prefers anonymity on grounds of not wishing to be entangled in a controversy: "Justice will not be done to the shareholders if you return their money with interest. It is not what they wanted when they bought the debentures."

**A**nd whether Ghosh, financial institutions and the government like it or not, the Ambanis are L&T investors too. And whether they like it or not, the Ambanis still have nominees on the company's board. With so many considerations to handle, if Ghosh does not watch it, the 6 July meeting could lead to a mini riot. Who will the chairman blame? The Ambanis, again? What excuse can he possibly come up with for delaying—or stalling—conversion? That he has no corporate vision?

The Ambanis, who were the movers behind the issue, did not mention any specific projects for wanting the money. But they did say that L&T would be bidding for turnkey petrochemical projects in the Far and Middle East, and it was only practical



D.N. Ghosh

to have a war chest ready.

The Ambanis slipped up here, as they earmarked Rs 600 crores of suppliers credit from the issue to family concern Reliance Petrochemicals Ltd. It became obvious that Dhirubhai wanted to use L&T money to help his pet projects along. The suppliers credit is another matter that Ghosh has to consider. Till now, the L&T chairman and his board have taken no decision on it whatsoever, and mum's the word.

A compromise could be the way out, much like the time institutions were content with Dhirubhai and his older son Mukesh resigning as L&T chairman and vice-chairman, in return for keeping Ambani nominees on the board. This time round, say senior L&T executives, Ghosh may use the Ambani business acumen and daring to further L&T's corporate interests. But at the same time, keep a very careful watch that Dhirubhai and his kin keep off the till. "After all," says the institution official, "one has to be cautious. Even if there is zero probability of the government changing, one cannot overlook it and act in a way that would cause problems or serious difficulties in the future." He adds: "Once is enough."

Perhaps it is, for everyone con-

**The present government, despite its die-hard attitude to wipe out the Ambani name from India's corporate map, is in a spot over L&T**

**"On the one hand, the IDBI directed L&T not to call in for the money. And on the other, the ICICI said that L&T should go ahead with the conversion"**

cerned. And the present government, despite its die-hard attitude to wipe out the Ambani name from India's corporate map, has probably realised that it is in a spot over L&T. There is simply far too much to handle, to unravel, and vendettas are taxing. Especially at a time when fixing political misadventures should get more attention than fixing corporate ones— if the government is unseated, then the Ambanis are more or less in the clear anyway.

Perhaps, finance minister Madhu Dandavate realises that as well. In Bombay last month, he implied as much. "The government stepped first," said the minister, "because of certain aberrations in the deal between financial institutions and the Ambanis (they and some banks sold L&T shares to Ambani-controlled companies, enabling the tycoon to take over L&T). This was rectified by ordering the winding up of BoB Fiscal (Bank of Baroda's merchant banking arm) which played a major role in the transfer of shares (BoB chairman) Premjit Singh was asked to go on leave. On the L&T board, Dhirubhai and Mukesh Ambani stepped down. D.N. Ghosh was brought in. With this, the government's role in the whole affair is over. It is now up to the financial institutions and Mr Ghosh to decide on further action."

This could be an indication that Ghosh is on his own. In that case, he has to handle Ambani pressure. Ghosh may have run the State Bank of India successfully as its chairman. But running L&T is a different proposition altogether. Where the Ambanis are concerned, people—as well as governments—get hurt. And investors are restive. The combination is explosive, and Ghosh is a manager, not a fire-fighter. •

**Oiga Tellis / Bombay**



## BANKS

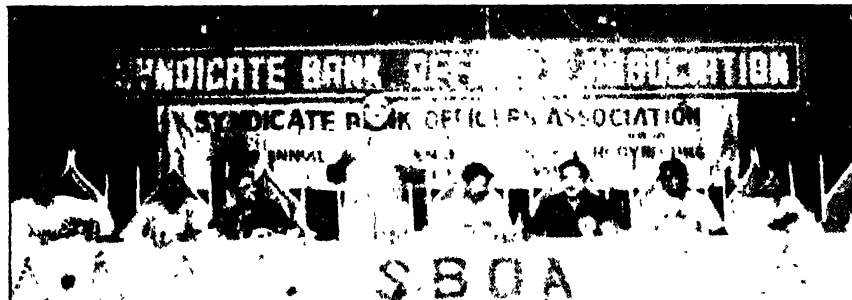
# Unity, disunity

*A fractious union throws Syndicate Bank's operations out of gear*

**T**he banking industry had never seen anything quite like this before. On 1 March this year, 600 members of the Manipal, Karnataka-based Syndicate Bank Officer's Association (SBOA) picketed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) headquarters in Bombay. The demonstration had a stunning effect: nobody was able to enter the Reserve Bank premises,

with ill-intentioned strikes

Actually, the problem could be deeper than that. The 9,000-member SBOA boasts a mammoth Rs 60 lakh bank balance, the control for which is believed to have precipitated the problem. Says M.S.N. Rao, general secretary of the bank's staff union: "Such amounts of money in any union deposit is bound to create serious



**The Syndicate Bank Officers' Association: fractious, irresponsible and dragging the bank down**

clearing and cash operations came to a standstill, and banking came to a halt countrywide. "Even officials of the RBI admitted that such a *dharna* was never held before the bank," crows SBOA general secretary H R. Shenoy triumphantly.

The point is that the demonstration had nothing to do with the RBI. In fact, it had very little to do with banking. The SBOA went on the rampage over a set of demands from its own bank's management, which includes raising the entertainment expense limit for officers, providing housing, and trivial things such as reimbursement of the cost of newspapers and increasing furniture loans. Many banks and corporations do much more, far better, for far less. Predictably, the bank's management junked the demands.

Industry insiders, however, say that the battle is not really between the Syndicate Bank management and the officer's union, but between two factions of the SBOA. One is led by its president M U. Pai, and the other by Shenoy, the general secretary. Shenoy alleges that Pai is a management lackey, while Pai accuses Shenoy of destroying the SBOA's negotiating power

problems. There will be bitter feuds to gain control of that kind of money power, which will only lead to the destruction of the institution itself." Apart from the vast sums involved, the union has enormous influence in various matters such as deciding the transfer of officers to various branches all over the country. Adds Rao: "As an observer, I can see this fight is for controlling the management functions, particularly transfers and promotions."

It appears that the bank's management has had enough of the union. It suspended SBOA secretary K S. Shet-

**Industry insiders say that the battle is not really between the Syndicate Bank management and the officer's union, but between two factions of the union**

ty and its Bombay zonal joint secretary P K. Bhatt for withholding cheque clearances on 30 March. Shenoy, the union's power player, says it was because the management "was unable to cope with mounting organisational pressure" and saw "functions of the branches coming to a standstill". Strangely, Shenoy's utterances get prouder as the bank slips further into a morass.

As it did again, on 5 April. The SBOA called a strike on that day, crippling Syndicate Bank operations. Meanwhile, the All India Bank Officer's Confederation (AIBOC) stepped in, and declared a two-day country-wide bank strike from 26 July in a gesture of sympathy towards the SBOA. Syndicate Bank management struck back, firing one officer, suspending 12 others in the bank's Bombay zone, and transferred out a large number of strikers and union sympathisers. That led to an all-India banking strike on 12 June. The AIBOC even went to the extent of putting up posters asking its member banks to dishonour Syndicate Bank instruments, in an apparent bid to bring the bank's management to its knees. "The bank's business," says SBOA vice-president V. Doraiswamy, "has been badly affected." Doraiswamy maintains that his association had nothing to do with the move, but there are not many people these days who believe anything SBOA officials tell them.

The rivalry seems all set to turn into a prolonged war. Says Rao, the staff union boss: "In their fight, the two men have committed thousands of office members to a struggle which has only brought them wage-cuts, transfers, suspensions and even a dismissal." He adds: "With Shenoy turning his guns on them, the management is favouring Pai and doing things his way."

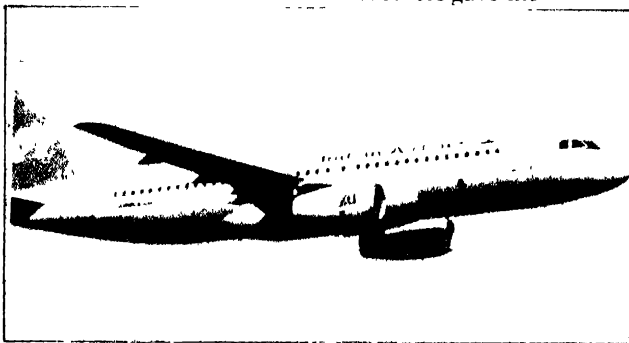
There are indications that the SBOA will have to be content with in-fighting if it wants a battle, but affecting the bank's operations is strictly off-limits. Industry insiders say that the Syndicate Bank top echelons have been ordered by the Union finance ministry not to give in to any SBOA pressure. This can only help. The management has taken a tough stand, and they appear to have New Delhi's blessings. To rebuild sagging deposits and a badly hit image, there may not be any other way out. •

**R. Bhagwan Singh/Madras and Hyderabad**



## Airheads

So, it's back to the beginning. First, Indian Airlines (IA) purchased Airbus A320s. Then, after one crashed in Bangalore, it grounded the others. Then, it wanted to sell them off, or lease them, trying to get rid of the stigma which said "IA pilots can't fly the planes." Or, "IA doesn't have the facilities to fly the A320." Now it seems that nobody wants to touch the aircraft, IA's early-June tender for leasing 14 A320s and



**The A320: back where it belongs?**

selling four more due from Airbus Industrie is a dud. Maybe it's Airbus pressure that is keeping buyers away. Or the fact that IA is offering the planes on short-term leases, for six months or so, when potential customers would prefer to have them for a couple of years. Hemmed in by non-response and politics (after all, the civil aviation ministry, in its infinite wisdom, decided to ground the planes in the first place) IA is now pressing for its A320s to be put back into service. Wise move. With IA schedules haywire, and flights being delayed by anything from two to ten hours, more planes can only help. But there's a problem. When airheads take decisions about Airbuses based on airy political grounds, it's difficult to get the planes back in the air.

## STOCK QUOTE

**"Let's face it. The ministry is run by Uncle Ho and Uncle Joe (Madhu Dandavate and Bimal Jalan)."**

*A senior finance ministry official.*

## Comeback?

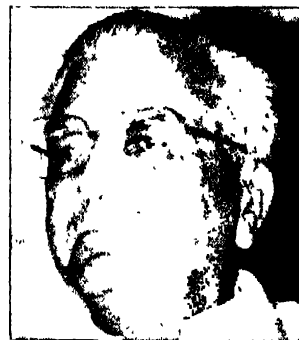
In 1988-89, Philips India Ltd showed a loss of Rs 16.4 crores, and corporate observers gave the

steady beating and labour was getting very aggressive. When managing director J Bergvelt announced early this year that he expected to show a "no-profit, no-loss" slate for 1989-90 it was seen in corporate circles as a wild boast. Only, it wasn't. Bergvelt went one better, and declared operating profits of Rs 5.48 crores and 10 per cent dividend. Parent company, Eindhoven, Holland-based Philips NV, is solidly behind its India operations. Philips India is planning to diversify, modernise and—according to the corporate grapevine—strike deals with some Indian electronic companies for either a stake in Philips or for using its excess

capacity. The way things are going, Philips could be back in the black—for good.

## Tauspeak

The Tau was in Gujarat last week, telling farmers in Mehsana district all about the green revolution, progress, remunerative prices to farmers (crop procurement prices have been raised by Rs 30 to Rs 110 per quintal for the Kharif season). And the Narmada Sagar project.



**Devi Lal: dam everyone**

The Centre will "definitely" go ahead with the project to uplift the state of farmers in the region, no matter that they are fairly uplifted already. They need a green revolution, said the Tau—who also doubles as deputy prime minister and the agriculture minister—and to hell with environmentalists who scream that the project will submerge thousands of acres of land, forests and numerous towns. People who will be displaced have no place in the Tau's equation, no matter that they have nowhere else to go. Of course, he knows all about projects: he has handled so many during his political career. "How to win votes" is one "How to sound authoritative" is another. The World Bank and the Tau should get along famously.

## THREAT OF THE WEEK

### The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)



• ULFA extremists demanded Rs five lakhs from companies for every tea garden they own in Assam, a move that could be worth more than Rs 10 crores by the time all tea firms receive the extortion letters. Going to the police means certain death for executives, the ULFA threatened. The Indian Tea Association met last week in Calcutta and reportedly agreed to give in, with companies to make payments individually. As usual, the Assam government is keeping quiet. And, as usual, the Centre will say fiddlesticks and make half-hearted noises to any S O S. Tea companies may not have any choice but to pay up. They would be mortally wounded if Assam went the Darjeeling way. Besides, industrialist Surrendra Paul's grisly murder by ULFA militants is a grim reminder for anyone who wishes to defy the ULFA.



# The Weekly's version

*Mani Shankar Aiyar's column on the magazine's story on J.B. Patnaik's escapades provokes a strong reaction*

It must be nice to be Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar. He enjoys the conventional *carte blanche* extended to columnists. No editor would tolerate as many mistakes on the part of us professional journalists as there were in Mr Aiyar's column in SUNDAY (10-16 June 1990). Not only did he get his facts wrong, many of his purported quotes were actually misquotations.

It is true that I am the author of two stories on the sexual escapades of the then Orissa Congress(I) chief minister, J.B. Patnaik, which were published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Mr Aiyar claims that one of these reports appeared in May 1966. He is wrong. Both the stories appeared in 1986. I was only seven years old in 1966.

Mr Aiyar has described me as "(Pritish) Nandy's correspondent in Bhubaneswar". I was never Nandy's Bhubaneswar correspondent. During the relevant period, I was *The Weekly's* special correspondent based at Calcutta. Any columnist who can get such minor details wrong is clearly ill-suited for the delicate and complex job of analysing serious issues. And Mr Aiyar, for motives best known to him, states, "quoting" my story, that Sebarani Das had stayed in a government guest-house in Bhubaneswar for 52 days without paying the bills. I had repeatedly mentioned in my report that Sebarani had stayed in the guest-house for 57 days.

The former Prime Minister's lackey seems to be under the impression that any person can stay in a hotel or guest-house for any period of time and walk away without settling the bills. Why don't you give it a try, Mr Aiyar? You would surely end up in a police station. You can walk away without settling the bills only if you have obliged the proprietor.

There is no doubt that Sebarani Das stayed in the Bhubaneswar government guest-house as a guest of the

chief minister. There is no other explanation for the woman's bold assertion, "Sent bill to PS to CM", at the time of checking out of the guest-house. Mr Aiyar quotes me as having asked Sebarani whether the chief minister visited her in the guest-house. He also quotes Sebarani's reply "Never. He is a saint. He took pity on this poor woman." Mr Aiyar then proceeds to proclaim "Is this the voice of a woman raped by a power-crazed megalomaniac?" I am sorry

that the supreme irony in Sebarani's reply was missed out by Mr Aiyar, who is, in his own words, "a literate person of delicate sensibilities and some refinement of taste". Some refinement, indeed!

Mr Aiyar has tried to create an impression that there existed only one legal case which was instituted against us by J.B. Patnaik. Actually, Patnaik organised a series of cases, spread over three states of the country. Many of these cases were filed by Congress-

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**THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA**  
THE FEATURES MAGAZINE



**SHOCKING**  
STRANGE ESCAPADES  
PATNAIK  
MINISTER



men, whose cause Mr Aiyar espouses. Cases were also brought against us by Patnaik's administration in Orissa. I was framed in a case on the grounds that I had assaulted some half a dozen police officers—and escaped from the site of the 'crime'. I was tailed by Patnaik's special branch men wherever I went in Orissa. My editor was worried about my safety. My mother spoke to my editor in this regard and I was given institutional protection in the absence of constitutional protection under the last regime.

**M**r Aiyar tries to debunk my exposé of J B Patnaik's sexual escapades. But he seems ignorant of the fact that long before our article appeared, Patnaik's private life had come under the scrutiny of the Oriya press and some Delhi publications. The then chief minister's affairs were even discussed on the floor of the state Assembly. If we devoted more time, energy and space to the issue, it was

out of a sense of duty to inform the people about the nefarious activities of a public figure. And we paid a heavy price for acting in the public interest. We were hounded and battered into submission.

One of those who testified about J B Patnaik's sexual perversion was Biswanath Sethi of Balipatna village. In order to protect him from the chief minister's wrath, we gave him an alias. He had given me a tape-recorded interview. Mr Aiyar now presumes that I had put words into Biswanath Sethi's mouth simply because I prefaced Jena's quote with the following words: "The sum total of Jena's statement is..." Well, it is a standard and well-accepted journalistic practice to condense or abbreviate an interviewee's statement.

Let me point out to Mr Aiyar that my report also had a direct quote from Raju Jena. The victim's words were: "The truth is that I was humiliated. How would you have felt if you had approached someone for a job and the person unzipped your trouser and masturbated you? It was sickening. I was defiled, he dirtied my person. I got married recently. I have told my wife everything about myself. But I couldn't tell her about my activities in the chief minister's residence."

Mr Aiyar, inexplicably, accuses me of never having produced the tape-recorded interview with Jena. I still have the tape. Mr Aiyar is welcome to listen to it. We would have surely produced it in court at the appropriate

of my vehicle. And how could a "personal assistant of Opposition leader Biju Patnaik" possibly accompany me when Biju Patnaik did not have a "personal assistant"? And now Mr Aiyar has conveniently used Mr Ahmed's curious claim to pronounce that "the whole scam was set up by political rivals of the chief minister".

A few more words about Mr Farzand Ahmed. He was not *India Today's* Bhubaneswar correspondent in 1986, as claimed by the all-knowing Mr Aiyar. He was the esteemed fortnightly's Patna correspondent, who regularly covered Orissa too. One of *India Today's* editors, who spoke to me recently, had telephoned Mr Ahmed the day *Illustrated Weekly's* 18 May, 1986 issue hit the stands. Mr Ahmed was asked whether the contents of *The Weekly's* story were true. He replied in the affirmative. When asked as to why he had not pursued the story himself, Mr Ahmed explained that he "thought" the magazine would not be interested in such a story. Mr Ahmed was promptly instructed to stop "thinking" and start reporting. What followed was the reportage of one who had been berated and reprimanded for missing a story.

Another victim of J B Patnaik's uncontrolled lust, Sukanti Hota of Jharsuguda, did only what was expected of her after we highlighted her sexual exploitation. She denied having written a letter to Sonia Gandhi detailing how the chief minister had ensnared and used her. We have, in our possession, a copy of the young widow Sukanti Hota's letter to Sonia Gandhi. It carries Hota's signature in ink. We are prepared to submit it to a handwriting expert. It's genuine and can disprove Mr Aiyar's statements.

Mr Aiyar, for reasons best known to him, has restricted his "analysis" to *The Weekly's* 18 May, 1986 issue. Our 3 August, 1986 issue carried a more damning indictment of J.B. Patnaik's sexual perversion in the form of sworn affidavits. These legal documents detailed how vulnerable youths were lured by the chief minister to take part in filthy and unnatural acts. And we still have on our records, the sworn affidavit of a young, unmarried girl, whom the chief minister tried his utmost to defile, but who had a miraculous escape. Would Mr Aiyar care to see that affidavit, or would that be too daunting an endeavour for his "delicate sensibilities"? •



PRITISH NANDY

**We have a sworn affidavit of a young girl, whom the CM tried to defile. Would Mr Aiyar care to see this or would it be too much for his "delicate sensibilities"?**

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR



time in the course of a fair trial. But we were denied that by the party whose cause Mr Aiyar espouses.

**T**o come to Mr Farzand Ahmed of *India Today*, whom Mr Aiyar has quoted at length. He had written in his magazine (16–30 June 1986) that the "personal assistant of Opposition leader Biju Patnaik" had accompanied me when I travelled to Balipatna to interview Jena/Sethi. I was not accompanied by anybody, except the driver



# Back to Jamir

*The former chief minister gangs up with arch-rival Vamuzo to unsettle the one-month old K.L. Chisi government*



NAGALAND

The irony is inescapable. Only a month back, the Nagaland People's Council (NPC) came to power in Nagaland by engineering a split in the S.C. Jamir Congress government. On 13 May, as many as 12 Congress(I) legislators ditched Jamir and formed the United Legislature Party (ULP) with the NPC. And two days later, K.L. Chisi of the NPC was sworn in as the chief minister.

But that was just the beginning of the drama. Hardly had Chisi settled down, when, on 14 June, 15 ULP MLAs withdrew their support to the government, reducing it to a minority. All the 15 defectors now pledge allegiance to the NPC led by the veteran Vamuzo. Vamuzo in turn collaborated with the Congress(I), formed a forum called the Joint Legislature Party (JLP), and staked its claim to form a government. Though Chisi has not yet quit formally at the time of going to the press, it is apparent that he will have to go—a victim of the same ploy he used to unseat S.C. Jamir.

But there is more behind Chisi's fall than just defections. Whatever be the nature of the chief minister's politics—many call him a master in the art of the toppling game—there is no doubt that he is an able administrator. And, within the short period since he assumed charge, Chisi tried to introduce revolutionary changes in the state's body politic—which has been sustained by drug smugglers, arms runners and underground outfits. It is an accepted fact in Nagaland that no government can survive without the support of this powerful syndicate. But a brave Chisi tried to shatter this myth: he was in the process of building up an alternative economy that is so essential to break the back of the vested interests in the state. But the narcotics lobby, in particular, ensured that he did not last long.

Of course, the role of former CM Jamir in the toppling game cannot be

underestimated. All this while, he was waiting in the sidelines, nursing the injury that Chisi, his one-time protégé, had inflicted on him only a month ago. Jamir, in fact, is considered a shrewd manipulator, adept at making behind-the-scenes moves. In July 1988 for instance, when Chisi broke away from the Congress(I) with 13 MLAs and formed the Congress (Regional), Jamir wholeheartedly extended his support to the new outfit. Reason: he wanted to settle scores with his arch-rival in the Congress—

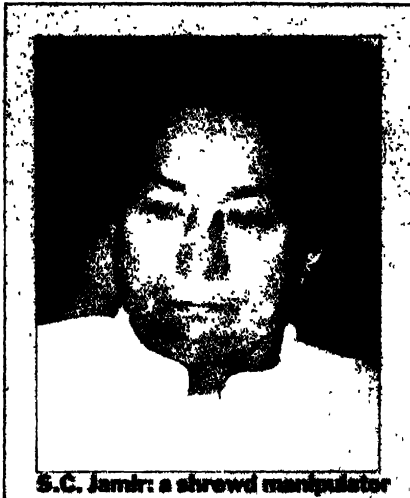
the then chief minister, Hokishe Sema. (Chisi had also staked his claim to form the government, but Governor Krishna Rao had turned down the appeal on the ground that many of Chisi's supporters in the Assembly had underground connections.)

This time, too, Jamir was careful enough not to be in the forefront of the defection game. Instead, he waited patiently for the breakaway faction to get in touch with him. And he did not have to wait for too long, realising that Jamir's support was crucial, Vamuzo,



Chisi (left) with Vamuzo: falling out





**S.C. Jamir: a shrewd manipulator**

a bitter critic of the former CM, decided to bury the hatchet, even if temporarily. According to an understanding reached between Jamir and Vamuzo, the latter would be the chief minister while Congress(I) legislators owing allegiance to Jamir would be given important portfolios. Jamir, at present, seems to be content with his role as kingmaker. In fact, the NPC leader even flew down to Delhi to convince the National Front (NF) leaders but according to reports, none of them were impressed by Vamuzo's plans. Many Dal leaders asked Vamuzo to go back home and talk to his own partymen. Jamir, too, has already met deputy home minister Subodh Kant Sahay and assured him that there would be no problems if an NPC-Congress(I) coalition was formed in Nagaland. But when Sahay seemed suspicious, another proposal was put forward: the Congress under Jamir would be delinked from the national body. But the NF government at the Centre is yet to make up its mind and many of its members feel that New Delhi should not involve itself in the politics of the sensitive north-eastern state.

But though Jamir has managed to "teach Chisi a lesson", there is no reason for him to feel secure. For, many of those who have returned to his fold had accused their leader of corruption and perpetrating autocratic rule only a month back. And this factor will weigh heavily with the Governor in case Chisi fails to prove his majority on the floor of the House. Already, politicians of the state are speaking in terms of a spell of Governor's Rule in the state—a pragmatic approach in view of the fluid political situation. •

**Rabjit Choudhury/Kohima**

## Bajpayi vs the rest

*Uttar Pradesh PCC(I) chief Rajendra Kumari faces opposition from all quarters*



**UTTAR  
PRADESH**

When Dr Rajendra Kumari Bajpayi was appointed president of the Uttar Pradesh (UP) unit of the Congress(I) in February last, little had she realised that the post would turn out to be the proverbial crown of thorns. Balram Singh Yadav's cronies, whom Bajpayi had replaced, were swearing "revenge" right from the very beginning. The Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC-I) chief's only "fault" was that she had tried to impose a modicum of discipline and order on a faction-ridden party that was showing no signs of pulling itself together even after the rout in the last parliamentary and Assembly elections. When Bajpai took over, the UP Congress(I) was split into two camps, one headed by Yadav and the other by Narain Dutt Tiwari.

issued that 36 first preference votes should go to both Fotedar and Singh, and the remaining 22 to Yadav. Yadav, who had only then been ousted from the state presidency of the Congress(I) was asked to garner the remaining 12 votes required from outside the party. But to the surprise of all, Yadav secured 43 votes, thus getting the support of not only other parties, but that of the Congress(I) as well.

Things were no better during the Vidhan Parishad elections which were held for the first time in the state in 38 years. The Congress(I) had fielded 38 candidates for the 39 seats allotted to the representatives from the standing bodies. But there were about 109 rebels from the party in the fray, the largest number coming from east UP. In many places, the party's office-bearers were canvassing support for these candidates. In the biennial polls held on 25 April, Congress(I) MLAs



**Bajpayi with Rajiv Gandhi: troubled times**

It was the Rajya Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha elections held in March, April and May that forced Bajpayi to come down with a heavy hand on her party members. For the first elections, the Congress(I) had put up three candidates—M.L. Fotedar, K.N. Singh and Balram Singh Yadav. With the party having only 94 seats in the UP Vidhan Sabha, a directive was

cross-voted, thereby facilitating the victory of Hari Pratap Singh, a Janata Dal candidate who was expected to lose in the very first round of counting. On the other hand, two Congress(I) contenders, Achhey Lal Balmiki and Fazle Masud nearly lost the election, and managed to scrape through only in the final round of counting. The upshot of such a rebellion was



that the Janata Dal bagged 23 of the 39 seats, while the Congress was left with only eight

An enraged Bajpayi immediately dashed off to Delhi with a full report of the cross-voting, returned, and began to act swiftly. The first members to be expelled from the party for six years were Sumanlata Dixit who had contested the Rajya Sabha elections as a rebel candidate, and Anusuya Sharma, chairperson of the UP-CC(I)'s labour cell, who had done the same during the Vidhan Parishad polls. Next on the firing line were two heavyweights: Ram Kirpal Singh, a former general secretary of the state Congress(I), who is widely believed to have masterminded the rebellion, and Dildaar Hussain Ansari, a sitting Congress(I) Vidhan Parishad member who was associated with Anusuya Sharma. Both are active supporters of Balram Singh Yadav.

There was a furore in the Balram Yadav camp. Its members left for Delhi and tried to plead their case through threats and memorandums. Ram Kirpal Singh termed the expulsions as "illegal." Citing Section 3 of the Congress party's constitution, Singh said that the party president had no power to expel ordinary block-level workers. But of course, in keeping with the Congress(I) tradition in UP, where expulsions have meant nothing, and where expelled candidates contested elections in the past on the party ticket, Singh and Ansari have remained in the Congress.

Bajpayi is the ultimate loser. At a meeting called by 40 dissident legislators in Lucknow on 16 May, Bajpayi was held squarely responsible for "demoralising" the party cadres in the state, and blamed for the poor showing in the recent elections. It was alleged that she had not taken any action against those rebel candidates who had "powerful" links in Delhi. The fact that the Congress(I) had failed to capitalise on any recent issue in the state under Bajpayi's leadership—like the communal riots in Kanpur and the two cases of atrocities against Harijans and members of a backward caste in Fatehpur the Prime Minister's constituency—was also highlighted. The nomination, by consensus, of Dr Amaar Rizvi as leader of the party in the Vidhan Parishad and of Arun Kumar Singh as deputy leader in the Vidhan Sabha is a concrete indication that Bajpayi's wings have been clipped. •

**Radhika Ramaseshan/Lucknow**

## The yogi and the commissar

*Dhirendra Brahmachari finds himself in trouble*



DELHI

For four long years he had been warding off their threats, but now the staff of the country's premier yoga institutes seem to be closing in on Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari. Ever since the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi—his mentor and pupil rolled in one—Brahmachari's fortunes have been on the wane. Rajiv Gandhi treated him with disdain, but somehow the Swami managed to cling on. Now, at least in principal, the Janata

the institutes. During his meeting with Brahmachari, the minister is understood to have advised him that resigning would be a more graceful option for the yogi. Brahmachari refused point-blank.

The minister also suggested that if Brahmachari was so keen to retain his position as director of the two institutes, the government could appoint an administrator above him. This offer, too, was rejected by Brahmachari. The minister left, giving the clear impression that the Swami would hear more about the charges through official channels.

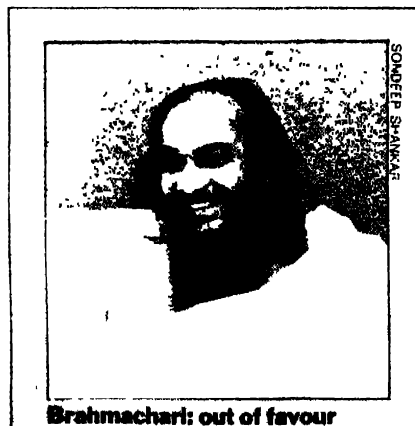
As it now transpires, all these years Brahmachari had been manipulating the official grant of Rs 60 lakhs to build up his personal assets elsewhere. Devi Dutt, president of the Yogashram union says that there is a Rs 21.1-crore tax evasion claim against Brahmachari.

The worst ignominy was faced by Brahmachari on 13 June when the Delhi Police 'arrested' him from the Yoga Institute on the basis of an FIR lodged by his students from Katra (Jammu). The students alleged they had been cheated by the Swami who had falsely claimed that their certificate yoga courses were recognised by the Government of India.

Undoubtedly, the reign of Dhirendra Brahmachari as the supreme authority on yoga in the country has been an autocratic and a mismanaged one. Recently, the Swami announced a lockout in one of the institutes and when he was sacked from the directorship of the CCRYN, he threw out expensive equipment worth Rs 30 lakhs. Dozens of employees have been suddenly dismissed and others have had to do without salaries for nearly a year.

Support for the removal of the Swami then, has come from all quarters. Earlier it was said that Brahmachari was sheltered by former minister of state for health, Saroj Khapade. Now, Brahmachari seems to have lost the support of even the Congress (I). It is only a matter of time before the invincible Swami finds himself completely alone. •

**Ritu Sarin/New Delhi**



**Brahmachari: out of favour**

Dal government has decided to oust the enigmatic 64-year-old yogi from the three yoga institutes run by him.

Charges of misappropriation, tax evasion and forgery have been piling up against Dhirendra Brahmachari for some time now. From 27 February, over 80 students and staffers of the institutes went on a hunger strike in the capital demanding his removal. The press paraded other fully-documented charges against the Swami. As a result, Dhirendra Brahmachari was ousted from the directorship of the Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN). The 100-odd harassed staff of the institutes have made a fresh demand: that the government also take over the Central Research Institute of Yoga (CRIY) and the Vishwawatan Yogashram.

Things came to a head, when after months of unrest the Union health minister, Rashid Masood inspected





Jyoti Basu (left) with Jigme Singe Wangchuk: can he solve the problem?

## Identity crisis

*Cultural alienation lies behind the present disquiet in south Bhutan*



NEIGHBOURS

In Thimpu, Bhutan's modern capital, where shiny Toyotas flash past fairy-tale bungalows, everything seems under control. The whispered rumours of disquiet in south Bhutan are met with furious denials, and the once-peaceful, still-picturesque Himalayan kingdom's brewing ethnic problem is swept under the carpet. Occa-

sionally, the odd accusatory leaflet, criticising the Bhutan government for its human rights violations surfaces, it is quickly followed by the government version—five pages of turgid prose—which claims that “anti-nationals” are spreading “malicious propaganda”.

“There are a few rotten apples in the kingdom. We have to eliminate them,” says Dago Tshering, the kingdom's deputy home minister, twirling his moustache. But the “subversives” are out of reach, sheltered in their

hideouts in the Dooars, in Siliguri and Garganda. The ultras of North Bengal—members of the People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) and the United Liberation People's Front (ULPF)—are mostly south Bhutanese Hindus of Nepali origin, protesting against the “cultural, economic and political imperialism” of the rulers. The Bhutanese government want the dissident groups to be repatriated, and it is to chief minister Jyoti Basu, on a private visit to Paro and Thimpu at the invitation of King Jigme Singe Wangchuk that they first registered their protest. “We may ask the V P Singh government to take action, but we have to gather more facts first,” says Tshering.

Besides cries of cultural and racial discrimination, the dissident leaders claim that the government has not allotted sufficient resources for the development of the southern plains and has disregarded the religious sentiments of the Nepalese Hindus, who constitute over a third of the kingdom's population, and are concentrated in the southern plains, adjoining the Indian border. The government in Thimpu, run by the *goh* (knee-length tunic)-wearing aristocrats has arrested and imprisoned hundreds of people, the extremists add.

Denying the charges, Dago Tshering points out that only 42 persons were arrested for “anti-national activities” in recent months, 39 of whom were later unconditionally released. In

## “We are close to India”

*King Jigme Singe Wangchuk's views*

### On the events in Nepal:

Any system of government is based on peoples' aspirations. If the people of Nepal want a multi-party system, they must have it. But King Birendra has a very useful role to play as a unifying factor in the politics of Nepal. The present government is not a very cohesive one... It is difficult for me to say whether King Birendra's attempt (to delay the growth of a multi-party system) was correct. I can't sit in judgement.

The events of Nepal have no significance in Bhutan. There can be no similar revolt in Bhutan

because our economic, political and social fabric is very different

### On Indo-Bhutanese ties:

We have always been India's closest and best friend. It is grossly unfair to judge Bhutan's relationship with India by India's relations with its other neighbours. We want to be indispensable to India's national interest. I know V.P. Singh, and I knew Maneka Gandhi long before she joined politics. Our family had excellent relations with the Nehrus. Jawaharlal Nehru was a great friend of Bhutan. We were

close to India, Sanjay and Rajiv. But we are very close to India, not just to the Nehrus

### On the government in Bhutan:

The biggest flaw with the monarchy is that you hold a high position because of your birth. We want a government that is most suitable to Bhutan's interests. Personality should only complement a system, the stability of a government should not depend on a person.

### On whether he can be dethroned:

The royal advisory council can complain to the National Assembly (the legislature) against the King. If the National Assembly unanimously decides that it does not want the king... it will be a serious situation.



the last decade, King Jigme Singe Wangchuk has given away over 2,500 acres of land to nearly a thousand landless households in south Bhutan. About 200 farmers and orange growers have been given special loans—about Rs 87 lakhs—because they were heavily in debt to Indian moneylenders. "We have spent approximately equal amounts of money on development of north and south Bhutan, and even today, all our major industries are in the south," says Tshering. "True, Buddhism is our state religion. But find me one case of religious discrimination and I will take action," he declares.

Illegal immigration and a rise in Nepali consciousness after the birth of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) lie at the roots of Bhutan's ethnic problem. In an effort to check infiltration (a genuine problem) and prevent thousands of illegals from settling in Bhutan, the government reacted hamfistedly, temporarily alienating many people who were completely loyal to the Bhutanese government.

As the GNLF agitation mushroomed, insecurity bred insecurity and the government attempted to force people to conform. "We believe in one country, one king, one people," says Dago Tshering. "Three years ago it was difficult to sympathise with the south Bhutanese. While the reports of economic discrimination are probably exaggerated and perhaps unfounded, the Nepalese in south Bhutan do have a case. They are being forced to speak *dzonghka* and wear the *goh* when they would like to speak Hindi or Nepali and wear their own clothes," said an official who claimed that the problem could still be solved if the government believed less in rigid enforcement of dress and language norms. "If there were genuine grievances, the people should have been allowed to ventilate them. Instead, the government, inexperienced in dealing with such problems, calmed down and only made things worse," the official said. One member of the Royal Advisory Council, Rizal, was first exiled to Nepal, and then repatriated and jailed.

At the moment, an uneasy calm has descended on parts of south Bhutan and the King's extended tour has helped to soothe the inflamed passions. "It is still not too late," says the official, "a calmer reaction by the government will nip the problem in the bud." •

**Srinjoy Chowdhury/Thimpu**

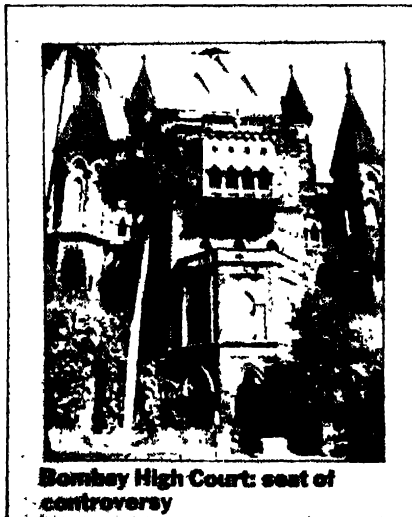
## Getting judgemental

*Allegations of wrong doing lead to Justice Desai's resignation from the Bombay High Court*



MAHARASHTRA

The 129-year-old Bombay High Court has split. The advocates and judges of this court have become divided into lobbies for and against Justice S K Desai, who resigned on 8 June, with the advocate general of Maharashtra, Arvind Bobde joining the anti-Desai forces. This situation has arisen following a controversy raging since 24 April, when Justice M P Kenia who was hearing the Mehta vs Mehta case with Justice Desai, went on fast alleging that he was



**Bombay High Court: seat of controversy**

being pressured to give a certain verdict in the property dispute.

Following Kenia's accusation, the Advocates Association of Western India (AAWI) asked Chief Justice Chittatosh Mukherjee to institute an enquiry into the matter to clear the name of the judiciary, the credibility of which appeared to have suffered. But Justice Mukherjee tried to brush the issue under the carpet and stoked the lawyers' resentment.

As no probe was ordered into the matter by the Chief Justice, the advocate general took the unprecedented step of writing a letter to the Governor of Maharashtra, Dr. C. Subramaniam, throwing light on the alleged relationship between Justice Desai and a young woman called Thel-

ma Menezes. Her name was first dragged into the controversy by Justice Kenia, who alleged that he had been threatened by Menezes.

In his letter, which was marked confidential but was leaked to the press, Bobde wrote that "unless a few erring judges are identified and at least transferred, the citizens cannot have faith in the judiciary. The judges are tending to become independent of the judiciary itself." About Menezes, Bobde wrote "It was known to the whole bar at the High Court and the civil court that this Thelma was contacting litigants whose cases were before Justice Desai's bench and making financial deals with them to get the case decided in a particular way."

However, Justice Desai, who had written to the Chief Justice explaining his position, told the press that he would demand an enquiry and, if it was not ordered, he would write to the President and ask him to institute an enquiry.

The AAWI split on this vexatious issue and a section sided with Justice Desai. They saw in this campaign against him, a conspiracy to thwart his investigation into allegations of corruption and malfunctioning levelled against members of the bar and bench. Justice Desai was appointed the head of a special investigation department created for this purpose and was to start the enquiry in July.

Meanwhile, Justice Desai in his letter to Chief Justice Mukherjee revealed two incidents which were reported in the press. In one, Rs 1.5 lakhs in cash was found in the toilet attached to the chamber of Justice Kenia. In another, an almost similar amount was found with the secretary of Justice Kenia.

But these allegations notwithstanding, Justice Desai failed to disarm his opponents. On 8 June he was informed by the office of the Chief Justice that he had been transferred to the Kerala High Court.

The judge, however, still insists that an enquiry should be held to find out the truth and it remains to be seen if justice will be done to him. •

**Olga Tella/Bombay**



# Containing the menace

*The AGP government's anti-ULFA campaign hasn't been successful*



ASSAM

Hirak Jyoti Mahanta, a top leader of the underground United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) always played hide and seek with the police. But finally his luck ran out last month

Acting on a tip-off, the police intercepted a *ruckshaw* near Jajukbari, on the eastern outskirts of Guwahati and its occupant was none other than Mahanta himself. In a desperate bid to escape, the ULFA leader fired from his M-20 revolver, but was soon overpowered.

Mahanta's arrest is being seen as a major breakthrough in the Assam police's recent offensive against the ULFA. Dispur, which soft-pedalled the ULFA issue for long, swung into action after the Centre, perturbed by the escalating violence perpetrated by the extremists, warned that President's Rule would be imposed if the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government did not adopt a hard-line approach.

The threat made the AGP leaders sit up. Without much fuss, chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta agreed to the blueprint prepared by the Centre to tackle the extremists. As part of the counter-insurgency measures, 15 companies of paramilitary forces were brought to Assam and B D Khar-khawal of the Assam-Meghalaya IPS cadre was made the state's new director general of police (DIG). However, what has surprised the Union home ministry is that even these measures have not yielded the desired results. A senior official told SUNDAY that the arrest of Hirak Jyoti Mahanta failed to produce the bonanza it was expected to in the form of further arrests of top ULFA leaders. All it led to was a few stray arrests of minor functionaries and the seizure of a cassette detailing the training of ULFA extremists.

Khar-khawal, who toured the districts to streamline the police apparatus, is now said to be a dejected man. Though the DGP refuses to comment on his department's performance,

some of his aides say that he was not given much help by the district authorities. What has further hampered police operations is the fact that the ULFA is steering clear of the police these days. ULFA chairman Rajiv Rajkhowa has reportedly asked his cadres, numbering almost 400, to maintain a low profile and desist from confronting the police. Besides, recruitment to the outfit has been suspended for the time being. Says Sid-dhartha Phukan, alias Anil Das, publicity secretary of the ULFA, "Any encounter with the police may result in the increase of police atrocities on innocent villagers who are the main-

ary. Dr Ranaj Pegu has characterised the ULFA as an "armed appendage" of the AGP. He alleges that the ULFA was only helping the AGP and the All Assam Students Union (AASU) to consolidate their upper caste hegemony in Assam.

Pegu further alleges that the ULFA terrorists abducted about 12 URMCA volunteers during the past few months, apart from forcing the tribals to take part in its social welfare activities. At least three meetings, held recently between the URMCA and the ULFA, at Guwahati and Gogamukh in north Lakhimpur, failed to clinch truce. The meeting at the capital was arranged by a Guwahati-based newspaper editor. Though the ULFA's 11-member central committee in a statement has assured the traders that they would not be harmed and its campaign of extortion and execution had been considerably reduced, uncertainties caused by it to the state's body politic have not dimi-



ULFA extremists: still elusive

stay of our movement. They provide us shelter and hide our arms." The arsenal of the 11-year-old ULFA comprises G-3 automatics, M-20 revolvers and AK-47 rifles, which are easily bought from the Great Arms Bazar in the wooded Kachin lands of West Burma.

If the ULFA topbrass is confident about taking care of the police, they are definitely on a sticky wicket when it comes to their relation with the plains tribals in the states. Over the past few weeks, the cold war between the ULFA and the the United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA), the political forum of the state's varied tribals, is escalating. The URMCA has not taken kindly to the ULFA's attempts to muscle into the tribal areas of North Lakhimpur. URMCA general secret-

nary There is no feedback yet on its possible role in the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls which are to be held in December. The AGP's feelers to the ULFA to start a peace dialogue have not yet evoked any response from it.

Added to this is the ambivalent attitude of the ruling AGP towards the rebels. Most of them had links in the past, either with the AGP or the AASU. Moreover, the AGP cannot risk antagonising them too much, as the ULFA has already won the confidence of a large segment of the rural masses by its overground welfare activities. So from all indications it seems that the spirit of the ULFA cannot be easily exorcised, even though home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and other central leaders have decided to adopt strongarm tactics. •

**Santanu Ghosh/Guwahati and Silchar**



# Twenty-three minutes

*TV serials try to do too much in too little time*

**N**ine o'clock serials on Doordarshan are stuck with a problem of form. How do you fit the menu of a full-length, 70 mm, Bombay film into a 21-inch screen over 23 minutes? That television producers should want to try is not surprising. Most cultures throw up a dominant form which then supplies the talent, generates the ideas and sets the standards for other, related kinds of art. In Britain, television feeds off repertory theatre, here it is suckled by the Hindi film.

Only the 'nine o'clock' is too small for such ambition and episode after

us know that she is fanatically determined to produce an heir. Someone should tell her that such virtuosity is wasteful. The television serial needs one-touch passing, there isn't the time to hold on to the ball and dribble. It is the routine of the genre which is meant to carry the narrative forward, not individual histrionics. Which is certainly one reason why television stars find it hard to make the marquee in films.

The moral of the story is that Doordarshan's nine o'clock fictions fail because they try to do too much. If this hadn't occurred to you before and

text. Not that these are wonderful serials, they aren't. But at least they try to animate a world that is not the world of the urban salariat. Whereas the Pakistani play having found its real world in the suburbs, now simply lives in it. And this it does comfortably, with style and wit.

There are signs that actors and producers are beginning to learn the modesty that becomes this medium. A good example is Mohan Bhandari, the lead in *Manzil Apni Apni*. Bhandari is the archetypal television star, anonymous, blow-dried, certain to get lost in a film. But he is effective on television.



## NINE O'CLOCK SERIALS

Abroad, they feed off repertory theatre; here they are suckled by Hindi films

episode explodes at the seams. You can't have location shooting, breathtaking interiors, colossal sets, great slabs of emotion, rural realism and comic relief, all together in half an hour, less the sponsors' seven minutes. Watching that appalling Monday night sitcom, *Basera*, I felt for Mehmood. I knew that what he really wanted to do was to go upstairs as Saira Bano's music master and cuddle her even as Sunil Dutt serenaded her from the window across the road. But he couldn't, it was the wrong house and this was television—there wasn't the time for a song.

The other problem with the Bombay film as a model is that it misleads actors into advertising emotion at great length. In a recent episode of *Zameen* (a rural saga of the genre Benegal), Uttara Baokar is lying in her husband's field, distraught. The camera closes in on her face, whereupon she takes all of half a minute to let

doesn't persuade you now, let me push my argument with a comparison. Namely, that Pakistani television plays are popular precisely because they try to do so little.

It is not just happenstance that Pakistani serials are called plays. Their conventions are borrowed from drawing-room drama and they have no cinematic ambitions. Apart from stock shots of traffic and buildings, the camera stays indoors, more often than not in drawing rooms. At the heart of every serial is a group of middle-class people living in Lahore or Karachi, the countryside figures occasionally but only for the prescribed purposes of either explaining or introducing a feudal character or uncovering the roots of urban vendetta. History and geography are absent, all you have is the seamless present, livened up with bits of local colour.

A serial like *Zameen* or *Kab Tak Pukaroon* is unimaginable in this con-

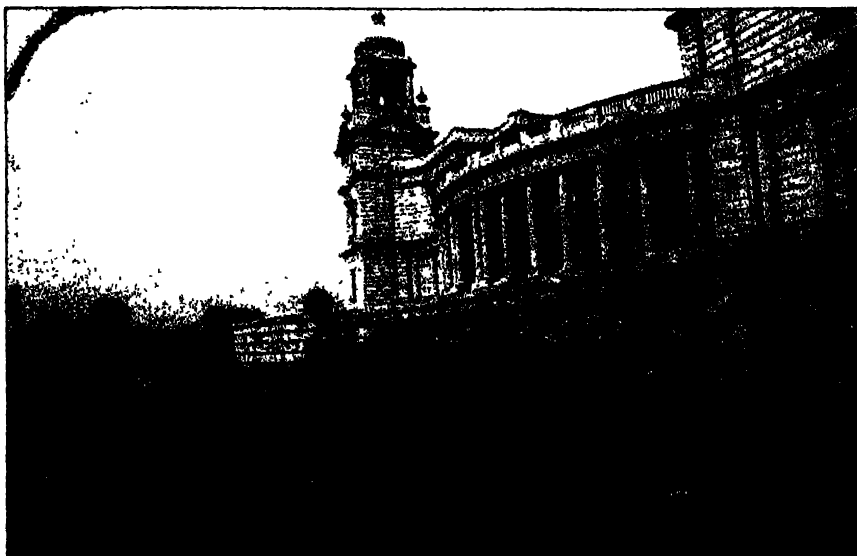
because there, his basic persona, a narcissistic, self-indulgent, ambitious man-on-the-make, seems to come so naturally and strikes so many answering chords in his end-of-the-Eighties audience.

But it is possible to adapt the extravagant idiom of Hindi films to the small screen. Ved Vyaas, who is our most successful television script-writer, not excluding Manohar Shyam Joshi, has the formula: a book that everyone's read, some sexual harassment, revenge, the Hand of God, a cast of thousands and apocalypse. But to carry it off, he needed episodes twice as long as the standard 23 minute one and more than a hundred of them. So our nine o'clock impresarios can either lobby for more time or look across the border, establish shot of mansion exterior, cut to fitted kitchen where Apa, Sabiha, Aijaz and the aged retainer, Salim, are deftly helping the soufflé rise. •



# Gently leaning

*Damage to the Victoria Memorial creates a controversy in Calcutta*



ASHOK MUKHERJEE

**I**t's one thing for the Tower of Pisa to lean. But quite another when Calcutta's Victoria Memorial does so—or, at least, a part of it. And sure enough, the entire city sat up to take notice when a 50-metre stretch of the white marble monument's terrace side wall cracked and tilted outwards. Since the crack developed after heavy rain on 18 May, the authorities claimed that it was probably caused by excessive water seepage.

Says Pankaj Kumar Dutta, conservator of Victoria Memorial, "This terrace/pavement is a superficial construction initially built to prevent the water from seeping into the foundation and harming the main structure. It is filled mainly with marble chips, so water seepage (with its consequent chemical reaction on marble) may have caused the crack." Dutta insists that since the crack developed on the terrace floor, it will in no way damage the main building. But the extensive press coverage given to the incident coupled with the average Calcuttan's concern for the monument (which serves as a museum, housing relics of the Victorian era) created a minor furore in the city.

The tilt of the terrace wall was first noticed on 19 May, following incessant rain the previous day. The

museum authorities claim that immediate steps were taken to remedy the situation and prevent any further damage. Says P.K. Agarwal, assistant chemist in charge of the conservation of the building: "Soon after we noticed the tilted wall we deputed our personnel and security staff to erect props to contain the damage." Visitors were also prevented from going near the damaged terrace to ensure that there were no accidents. Various government agencies with engineering expertise were contacted, to help with the restoration, chief among them, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). The crack was covered with polythene sheets to prevent any further water leakage, and the authorities claimed that the damage would be rectified soon.

Such claims notwithstanding, the crack raised quite a few questions about the maintenance of the monument, forcing the museum authorities on the defensive. Says Dutta, "Basically it is quite a superficial crack and even the CPWD engineers who are responsible for the restoration of the perimeter wall, have seconded our opinion." However, junior engineer B.N. Guha, who was present when the damage was first discovered, refused to comment: "I will not say anything about it. I have been instructed not to

speak to the press."

This reluctance to come clean is surprising considering the CPWD has had a long association with Victoria Memorial. According to P.K. Agarwal: "All maintenance work of the building is carried out through the CPWD but sometimes they may not have the readily available expertise, so we contact specialist opinion to solve our problems." For example, in 1988, expert opinion was sought from the Central Building Institute at Roorkee regarding the nuisance caused by pigeons in the museum. Right now there are about four or five schemes which will be implemented in the near future to preserve the monument and its displays—such as partial air-conditioning, screening of windows etc. "So its not as if the accident is the result of sloppy maintenance," says chief restorer, Arun Ghosh.

Who then, should be held accountable for the damage? The CPWD or the museum authorities? According to Ghosh it is a question only the curator-secretary Hirendra Nath Chakraborty can answer. "It is entirely Mr Chakraborty's responsibility," he says, "to punish if there is any callousness and to praise if there is any good work involved." The curator, however, refused to answer such questions: "I was away in London when this incident took place, so I will not be able to comment on it."

But, despite claims of impeccable maintenance, the formation of the fissure proves that there must have been a major slip somewhere. Agrees Dutta. "There must have been some mistake", going on to rationalise, "it is only human to make mistakes. After all nobody is capable of knowing everything".

Arun Ghosh's approach, on the other hand, seems more reasonable: "The problem is that this monument is so dear to all Calcuttans that such an incident is obviously embarrassing for the authorities. Moreover the media has also added to the general anxiety about the memorial. So everyone is more interested in a face-saving exercise rather than initiating a proper enquiry as to why such a thing happened."

For the moment, the authorities are concentrating on Operation Salvage. The wall is to be repaired (with a new filling of chips before the marble slabs are put back into place) as soon as possible. And work is progressing at a brisk pace. ●

**Nandini Sengupta/Calcutta**



# Last among unequals

*Mira Hamermesh's film on untouchability in India, Caste At Birth, is a hit with Channel Four viewers*

**I**n India, women, untouchables and drums are for beating. And Mira Hamermesh's film for Channel Four, *Caste At Birth*, a cinematic expression of this truth. An untouchable writer quotes Goswami Tulsidas on the subject of caste, a Brahmin gets his gold chain blessed so that he doesn't have to wear the sacred thread "which would look quite silly in a swimming pool." These, and other characters move in and out of the film, a scathing report on untouchability in India.



Mira Hamermesh

With considerable advance publicity to precede its screening on Channel Four, the film proved a success with both critics and ordinary viewers. But *Caste At Birth* is only the last part of Hamermesh's triptych on the essential nature of conflict. Her first film in this series, *Maids And Madams*, a subtle but strong indictment of apartheid, examined the emotional relationship that exists between Black household workers and their White madams. The movie won four international awards, including Channel Four's first Prix Italia. The second film, *Talking To The Enemy* focussed on the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, through a chance meeting between a Palestinian journalist and an Israeli editor.

With Hamermesh, a Polish Jew who survived the holocaust because of her enterprising father, conflict—and the role of women in it—is an overriding concern. The image of a Harijan mother lamenting the killing of her children in a Bihar village is the prototype of the Jewish mother mourning her dead during the Nazi period.

**I**t was writer and good friend Mulk Raj Anand who suggested that Hamermesh make a film on the caste conflict in India. The idea made sense to the director, marking as it did a natural progression from her earlier features. But working on as sensitive a subject as caste in India wasn't easy. "I had trouble getting a researcher," recalls Hamermesh. "In Bihar we were menaced by the landlords. They came on strongly and were very threatening. Finally we told them that we would film them as well so that they could have their say."

Hamermesh's film takes the viewers on a fairly comprehensive tour of India, moving from the caste segregations of urban cosmopolitan Bombay to the horrors of the atrocities committed on backwards in Bihar. The unit visited Nonhi village, near Jehanabad, Bihar, where on the night of 16 June, 1988, upper caste landlords killed 19 members of a family, only because one member had asked for the minimum wage decided upon by the government. The survivors of the Paswan family tell the story of the

night that left them completely broken.

But justice wasn't forthcoming even after the brutal massacre. Instead, Hamermesh informs us, the home minister actually blamed the untouchables for the incident. And even though the Paswan family can identify the assailants, nobody has been arrested. The family remains resigned to its fate, well aware that the landlords have both the police and the administration on their side.

Next on the itinerary is rural Maharashtra, and the village of Hivde where there are still two wells for the inhabitants: one for the upper castes and the other for the more lowly-born. During the drought the tankers fill the well of the upper castes; the untouchables simply do without water. Also featured is a wall in the village, which the untouchables are forbidden to cross.

In Bombay, a Dalit writer tells of his struggle to gain acceptance; a scheduled caste medical student confesses that he feels that his class-mates don't wish to see him rise; a woman







Stills from the film *Caste At Birth*: conflict is an overriding theme

doctor, who is standing for election, tells of her attempts to organise the Dalits; Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's grandson, Prakash, carries on the campaign against untouchability, and students in St Xavier's College debate the rationale behind reservations.

In Surajkund, Haryana (on the border of Delhi), where stone quarries survive on the labour of the untouchables, Swami Agnivesh describes his activities with the Dalits. The backward community's march to the local Hindu temple, demanding right of entry, and the beatings at the hands of the upper castes that followed, are also recounted. Says the social activist: "We have about 150 million untouchables in India who are leading a life worse than the Blacks under apartheid, and yet the world is not aware of the problem."

**"W**e spent three months researching in India," says Hamermesh, "and what Bishakha (her researcher) and I found was that though

**H**amermesh's film takes the viewers on a fairly comprehensive tour of India, moving from the caste segregations of urban Bombay to the horrors of the atrocities committed on backwards in Bihar



most people say Bihar has the worst cases of assault on Harijans, the problem is prevalent all over India. We built up a mountain of files simply from press cuttings. I must say the Indian press is marvellous in its openness and its dedication, but television is another matter. It's such a pity, because instead of using television positively to educate, it's just used to create illusions."

The truth of the matter is that there are as many as 10,000 attacks on the lower castes every year, according to official estimates. The unofficial count

goes even higher, as the atrocities committed by those in power are not put on record.

But the very fact that caste distinctions continue even today in India shocks the average Western viewer. Not surprisingly then, *Caste At Birth* has received very positive reviews for the depiction of a little-known malaise. There is some amount of relief as well. As one critic put it: "At least there is one Third World problem for which the British bear no colonial guilt. It existed before they came in."●

**Shrabani Basu/London**



# THE NAWAB KNOWS BEST

The Raj is well and truly over as far as Indian cricket is concerned. Chairman of the selection committee, Raj Singh Dungarpur, has decided to step down from the post he occupied for long years (too long, say some).

But who was behind Dungarpur's decision?

Take a bow, former Indian skipper Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi. Apparently, Tiger, a long-standing friend of Dungarpur's, advised the latter to "step down

RASHBEHAR DAS



gracefully". The Indian Test team had been performing like a third-rate club side, with the entire blame for the current

state of affairs being laid at Raj Singh's door. The only way Dungarpur could extricate himself from the mess, with his

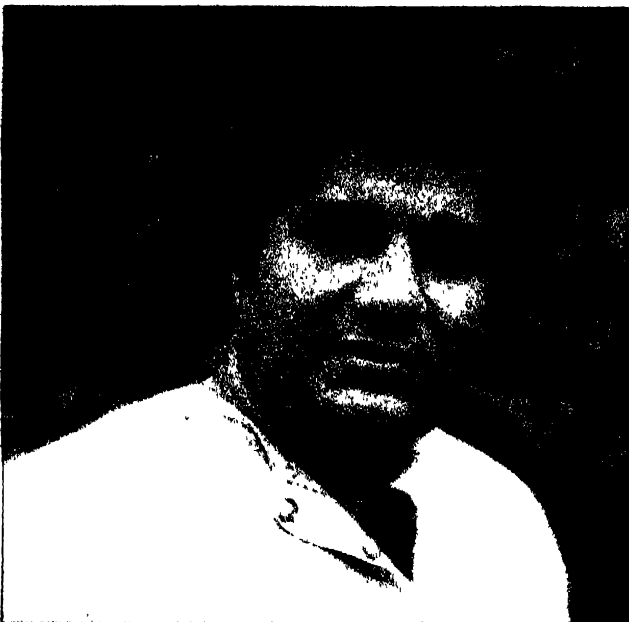
N PRASAD



(Top) Raj Singh Dungarpur: on the Tiger's trail; (left) Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi: preferring good advice

dignity intact, said Pataudi, was if he resigned of his own accord. Raj Singh took the advice.

CHITRAJIT GHOSH



Anup Jalota: who would have thought it would end so soon?

## THIRD TIME LUCKY?

The first time around it was said to be a case of frustrated ambition.

Sonali Jalota could no longer bear to play second fiddle to husband Anup, *ghazal* and *bha-*

*jan* singer of some repute, and was filing for divorce. (She was also planning to hitch up with tabla player Roopkumar Rathod; but that is another story.)

Anup Jalota, for his part, made the usual

**Sonali Jalota: history repeats itself**



brave noises ("I wish Sonali well", "We were mutually incompatible", "Perhaps, it's all for the best" etc.) and then went and hitched his wagon to Bina, a disciple of his father Purshottam Jalota.

This time things were expected to work out. After all, hadn't wife number two promised to occupy the back seat forever and ever? And even, silence her singing voice altogether for *pati parmeshwar's* benefit.

But no, Anup's run of bad luck continued. And his second marriage ended up on the rocks as well. The singer has filed a petition for divorce, and as soon as that comes through he'll be back in the marriage mart once more.

And who knows, he may well be third time lucky!



## TIRED AND TIRESOME

On the whole, it's a rather tired effort. And what's more, it's pretty tiresome as well.

Seventies' sex symbol Mumtaz's attempt at a comeback to movies, *Aandhiyan*, only makes you wish that she had stayed away. Whatever remains of the once-fresh appeal is hidden under layers of make-up, the receding hairline camouflaged by a ghastly fringe, and the give-



**Mumtaz in *Aandhiyan*: not much of a comeback**

away lines around her eyes masked by the most unflattering pair of glasses available.

The gamine charm is gone. And, unfortunately, a mature grace has yet to take its place.

Playing a single parent Mumtaz shares an exceptionally close relationship—with the faintest shades of incest clouding the screen on occasion—with her young son. The two share what can only be termed as romantic evenings together, with much whispering of sweet nothings, little intimate touches and...well, we suppose you get the picture, while the young man's girlfriend pines away at a safe distance.

If good old Mumu is trying to prove a point, then we're afraid nobody's too convinced

## OVER HIS DEAD BODY

When Oliver Andrade, municipal corporator, physical instructor, hockey and football coach, founded the Jogger's Park on Carter



**Oliver Andrade: threatening self-immolation**

Road, Bombay, he hadn't anticipated finding himself in the thick of controversy. For, initially at least, things appeared to be working out fine. The locale soon became the place for a work-out, with physical-fitness enthusiasts turning up in ever-increasing numbers.

But in their wake came big-time business, intending to cash in on the vast numbers that congregated there everyday. Their plan: to set up shopping arcades all round the park. After all, they would never be short of custom.

They had reckoned without Andrade, though. "I will burn myself before the ground if the businessmen commercialise and spoil this area," he thundered. "They can do so, but only over my dead body." •

## A CELEBRITY AFFAIR

As far as Calcutta was concerned, it was, without a doubt the wedding of the year. And everybody who counted as anybody in the city—from chief minister Jyoti Basu, actresses Mamata Shankar and Aparna Sen, actor Soumitro Chatterjee, singer Ruma Guha Thakurta to writer

Sunil Gangopadhyay—put in an appearance when Satyajit Ray's son Sandip celebrated his marriage to Lolita Chatterjee.

The wedding—a simple registration ceremony—had been held on 24 December, 1989. But the reception, that announced the happy

event to the world, took place only on 4 June, 1990. The delay was, apparently, occasioned by Sandip, he was too busy shooting for *Goopi Gayen Bagha Bayen III* to take time off for partying.

But nobody was complaining about the delay at Sikka Palace, Ballygunge, with Lolita much the radiant bride and Sandip the proud groom.

**At the reception: (from left) Sandip, Jyoti Basu, Lolita and Satyajit Ray**

TARAPADA BANERJEE





# Dollars and scents

*The new Zeenat perfume is a super seller*

**Q**uestion What do Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor and Zeenat Aman have in common? Yes, all three are sex symbols, but that's not the answer we're looking for. What binds these actresses together is that all of them have the distinction of having a perfume named after them. Aman, of course, being the latest to join this elite club, with Bernard Per-

sales. Yet we needed a name which is well-known. And this was Zeenat Aman.

"She is the only actress to bring a flavour of the West to the Indian silver screen. It is only fitting that she be nominated to bring a touch of the East, in the form of a perfume, to the world. Besides she was also Miss India and Miss Asia. She has

for Hindi films is well-known. The fame of Aman in these parts, it was thought, would do the trick.

And sure enough, when Perrin and Combredet launched the perfume in Dubai they made a killing. "We sold the six months stock, around 20,000 bottles, in four days. That is, our representative in Dubai, Sheikh Mohamed Syed made a commitment to sell this much," says Perrin. "Of course, the launch of the perfume in Dubai was followed by very heavy advertising both in the print media and TV commercials."

Zeenat, bottled in a flacon of plain and frosted glass, specially designed by Crystal d'Arques, Paris, is priced at \$20 for the 100 ml bottle. The 50 ml bottle goes at \$16. The top notes are jasmine, rose and tuberose, the body notes are peach and sandalwood; and the back notes are cedarwood, patchouly and vanilla. The publicity brochure describes it as "a bouquet of roses, jasmynes and tuberoses, boosted with a peach fruity note, releasing after a while a mysterious cocktail of sandalwood, olibanum and honey." It contains around 80 raw materials from India, including *oudh*, and is packaged in black, gold and hot pink.

Aman is understandably thrilled at having been chosen by the company which has marketed such other successful perfumes as Cobra. Says the actress: "Needless to say I feel very flattered and privileged and involved. I am very happy. I have been a part of it right from the beginning." After the Dubai success, Zeenat (the perfume) will travel to the south-east. Says Perrin. "In autumn we will launch the perfume in Singapore and Hong Kong, and next year in the United States and England. We have had many queries from Europe also."

Despite the spate of advertising in Indian magazines, Zeenat will not sell in the country except in duty-free shops. Indians will have to make do with the actress, instead, who says about her scent: "Very exotic and long-lasting. A sensual smell."

A little like the lady herself. •

**Olga Tella/Bombay**

SHARDA THAKAR



**Zeenat Aman with Bernard Perrin: at the Bombay press conference; (below) the advertising campaign for Zeenat, the perfume**



rin and Marie-Jeanne Combredet of Jeanne Arthes Parfums naming their latest scent after the Indian star.

But why Zeenat? Explains Perrin: "It is the trend in the West today to name a perfume after a famous actress. So, we looked and toyed with a whole lot of names. We could not take a current box-office star because she could very well be a flop in her next film and this would be dangerous for

over 70 motion pictures to her credit and has a special place in the hearts of Indians, Pakistanis and the millions of Asians who are addicted to Indian movies."

The rationale behind choosing an Indian actress was simple: the perfume was to be marketed in the middle-east first, and the Arab penchant



# The other Delhi

*Khushwant Singh on the capital's flora and fauna*

**D**elhi is a city for all seasons. And *Nature Watch* by Khushwant Singh and Suddhasattwa Basu is a delightful chronicle of the unfolding seasons of the year in the capital. Just as *Delhi*, his best-selling historical fiction, is partly a celebration of his deep attachment to the city, Khushwant Singh's *Nature Watch* is a diary of the year-long unveiling of the city's less-known facets—its flora, fauna, fruit, festivals, and the heat and dust of summer.

The style is unusual. It is written in the manner of the *baramasi* folk songs of the north, which relate the joy of the impending rains in the month of *sawaan* (monsoon), the festivals of the different seasons, and the hope and anticipation of a farmer's family as they wait for the harvested grain to be brought in, during *baisaakh*.

In Khushwant Singh's eyes, Delhi is not just a mindless mass of concrete around a green oasis. He details the glories of nature which exist in the capital—in the tree-lined avenues, the ribbon-like strips of green in residential colonies (a lawn in Delhi parlance), the parks and the gardens of the city. Basu's elegant illustrations evoke the colours of nature in their fine delicate lines.

The Sardarji's nature watching has been done on "a very restricted landscape"—most of it in his private back garden enclosed by a barbed wire fence and covered with bougainvillea creepers. But, this small patch is by itself unique in Delhi for it houses—among the limes, oranges, grapefruit, pomegranate, a few jasmine, *raat-kirani* and *madhumati* creepers, assorted vegetables—four ten-year-old avocado trees. A species not usually seen outside the immaculate fields of agriculture research institutes in the north.

There is a profusion of birds, whether it is the common sparrow, crow, mynah, kite, pigeon, babbler which abound in the city, or the golden orioles, barbets, koels, peafowl, *papeehas*, grey hornbills, lapwings who visit the gardens. These birds can be sighted in the various bungalows and in the city's parks, like the Lodhi

Gardens. But, today, one regular haunt of Khushwant Singh, the luxuriant lawn of the Delhi Gymkhana Club, is no longer likely to attract as many birds as it did in the past because the roads on both sides of the club have been opened to traffic after the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi moved out of Race Course Road.

February is the month of regeneration in Delhi and the harbinger of spring in the capital is the *semul* (silk cotton tree) which is covered with red

blossoms at the beginning of the month. By mid-February, the capital is a riot of colours—the huge gardens of the sprawling bungalows, the verges and borders of avenues, the roundabouts, the terraces in the colonies are all ablaze with calendula, peony, nasturtium, phlox, salvia and a host of other annuals. This is the month of flower-shows with the capital's elite parading in their finery, trying to outdo the colours of the flowers.

Though, the *semul* is lampooned unjustly as an useless tree, for its flowers have no fragrance and its fruit is inedible, Khushwant Singh notes that its astringent gum has medicinal properties and its pods release a gossamer floss which makes a pillow comparable to that of the softest down.

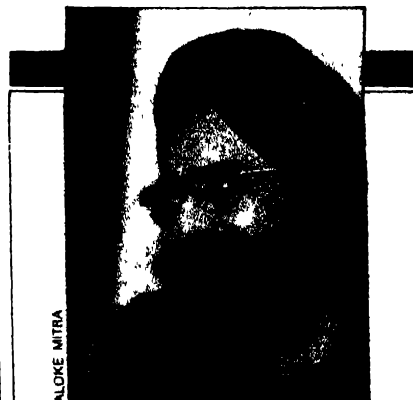
In April, the *gulmohars* blaze in their fiercest scarlets and oranges, but May is the month of the glorious shower of the laburnum—the fresh looking yellow blossoms appear in clusters like grapes—a sight for sore eyes in the heat of the month. The intense heat and dust of June is only mitigated by the arrival of the mangoes—the *langras*, *dussehra*, *sarauli*, *safeda*, *rataul*, *chausa*, *amrapalli* from Uttar Pradesh join the *bangarpalli* and *totapari* from Andhra Pradesh, *mologoa* of Karnataka and the *malda* and *gulab khas* from Bengal.

With the rains in July come the multicoloured kites and *jamuns*. The *jamun* sellers pitch camp on the broad avenues in New Delhi, guarding the trees till the fruit can be shaken off them into sheets held just above the ground. And November, which heralds the end of the cycle, is a month for butterflies who impart their colours to the gardens.

With his blow-by-blow account of an ever-changing city, Khushwant Singh details the glories of nature which still exist in the capital. Singh has elevated Delhi from its status of the 'city of graveyards'. The next time you think Delhi is a dull, lifeless city, think again.

**Shubha Singh**

*Nature Watch* Text by Khushwant Singh. Illustrations by Suddhasattwa Basu. Published by Lustre Press Private Limited, 1990.



ALOK MITRA

**Nature Watch has an unusual style. Khushwant Singh details the glories of nature which exist in the capital and elevates Delhi from its status of the 'city of graveyards'**





**W**hen film heroes begin to crash on screen, they turn into real life heroes instead. As Govinda did in Filmcity recently during the shooting of *Mohabbat Ki Aag*

A bus-load of rowdy tourist fans were demanding to be allowed on the sets. Since this would mean moving cameras and other equipment and delaying shooting, the director, naturally, put his foot down.

The enraged fans then went on the rampage punching and kicking everyone in sight. In the midst of all the confusion, someone



Govinda: real life hero

threw a large stone at Govinda. The stone struck a unit-hand, instead. Seeing the poor man's battered face, Govinda, in a fine emulation of his screen persona, bundled him into his car and rushed him to hospital

That's all very well. But the one person who was missing during the entire episode (even though he had reported for shooting) was Shakti Kapoor. For, sensing danger, Shakti, never mind the big, brave talk, slunk away to some safe corner

**I**ronical situations are so commonplace in the film world that they take no one by surprise. Take the Srikant Nahata-Jayaprada affair, for instance. Two years ago when news of

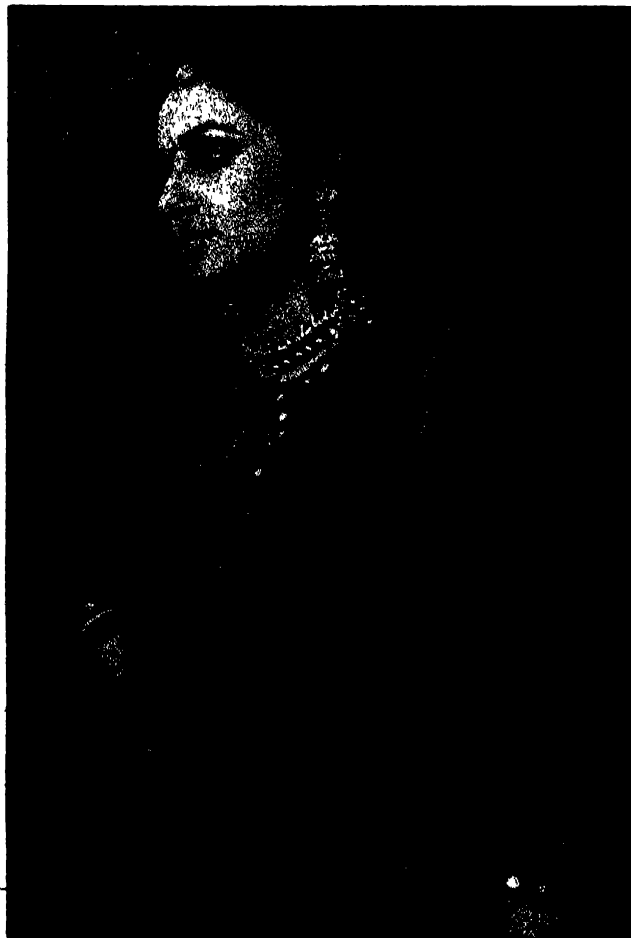
their 'marriage' hit the film world, Srikant's wife Chandra refused to grant him a divorce and make things easier for the erring couple.

Well, Chandra's finally tired of waiting for hubby to return and decided to separate from him instead. One would have expected Jayaprada to treat this as a piece of good news, but now she appears to be sceptical about her future.

The lady now believes that Srikant is not such a good bet after all, especially after she realised that he was playing the field in Bangalore while she was working hard in Bombay. "How can I trust a man who can leave his wife and have several flings?" the beautiful actress is reported to have said.

Well, she does seem to be talking sense now. Even if the truth about Srikant Nahata has dawned on her just a little too late.

**Jayaprada: late realisation**



GAUTAM PATOLE



Rajesh Khanna: another comeback bid

**T**he most hilarious pair-up in recent times is that of Rajesh Khanna and Deepika 'Sita' Chikhli of *Ramayan* fame. Apparently, Rajesh is going around town raving about Deepika to all and sundry and to the few producers with whom he still enjoys some clout (it's surprising, but some old faithfuls remain). They would, apparently, do anything for the ex-

phenomenon—though expecting them to promote Deepika in a film opposite Rajesh is pushing it a bit

As far as Rajesh is concerned, this could be his grandest passion yet, and also his last bid to make a comeback of sorts. After all he's tried a zany Dimple and a sophisticated Tina and they got him nowhere.

Maybe he thinks a simple, docile Sita can rope him out of the awful mess he is in?

**T**he latest desperado in town is the small screen spiritual avatar—Nitish 'Krishna' Bharadwaj. He is so keen to make it in films that he is throwing parties to promote himself, where the number of female invitees far exceeds the males.

At a recent party, Varsha Usgaonkar, Rupa Ganguly and Pallavi Joshi were present. And Nitish was flirting with each of them in turn. The surprising thing is that—unlike other big-time heroes who promise bit roles to clinging starlets in between whispering sweet nothings into their ears—Nitish really does not have too many roles for himself, leave alone offering them to others.

So what is it about him that keeps all the women in his life, and all the women at his parties, happy and guessing?

Not his godly good looks surely! •

PRATAP DNECHA



# The glitter and the filth

*A majority of Delhi's population lives in unhygienic conditions*

**L**ush green gardens, tree-lined avenues, broad roads and neat rows of residential colonies—to a casual visitor, Delhi is an ideal metropolis. But for those who have been living in the capital for quite some time, the outward glitter can hardly conceal the filth beneath. An estimated 45 per cent of Delhi's population still lives in the most unhygienic conditions—hutments where drains have been chocked for years, drinking water is scarce and the air is filled with the stench of rotten garbage. No wonder, experts have time and again warned that the outbreak of cholera in the capital in 1988 that left over 1000 people dead was no chance happening. A similar epidemic could hit Delhi again.

Not that the Delhi administration is doing nothing to improve living conditions, especially of those staying in the slums. With the monsoon round the corner, the authorities have launched a massive awareness campaign. Health officials are going round distributing publicity material and chlorine tablets. Steps have also been taken to clean up the drains.

Of course, VVIP visits to the slum areas are part of this action plan. Last fortnight, the new health minister, Rasheed Masood Khan, accompanied by a host of senior officials went round East Delhi's Guru Tegh Bahadur Hospital. The purpose was to ensure that the hospital was fully geared up to



Inside a slum area in Delhi: drinking water is scarce

tackle any emergency. The hospital superintendent assured the minister that 120 beds had been kept aside for cholera victims.

But are such cosmetic measures enough? Warned Sabir Ali of the Council for Social Development, "The fact that no epidemic of the 1988 proportion has hit Delhi is only a matter of chance and can be attributed to inadequate rains last year." Municipal officials, too, have time and again asked the authorities to take measures, but, they allege, nothing worthwhile has been done.

The Supreme Court also had set up a committee comprising experts like Mira Shiva of the Voluntary Health Association, B.P.C. Sinha of the Central Ground Water Board and Paritosh Tyagi of the Central Pollution Control Board to go into the issue. The committee made several recommendations in its interim report submitted in April this year. Strangely, the court has taken note of only one recommendation—that a committee of technologists and experts should be formed to examine the problems of Delhi. "It is really unfortunate that this kind of an attitude should be there," complained an activist work-

ing in a resettlement colony in the capital "Delhi's health problems will continue to fester," she added.

**A**ccording to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "Cholera is an entirely man-made disease, directly linked to poor sanitation in crowded areas and non-availability of safe drinking water." And the reality is that even though Delhi is posh and spacious in its southern and central parts, most of the city's population live in areas without proper drainage. And the city administrators admit that only 134 out of the 548 unauthorised colonies in the capital have sewage disposal facilities. Besides, there are numerous *jhuggis* and resettlement colonies where the conditions are worse. For instance, only four colonies in the trans-Yamuna area have filtered water supply.

There is practically no drainage system either in these areas. According to the interim report, in several parts of the city where the epidemic occurred, drains carrying domestic waste water mixed with human excreta were flowing towards depressions near the dwellings. "With the increase in population and progressive increase



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in the quantity of water supplied per person, these depressions turn into pools of foul water that spill into adjoining houses and over the streets, especially during the rains," the report said. And, with shallow handpumps being a major source of water despite the administration banning them, drinking water is also polluted. Residents are forced to use the handpumps, knowing perfectly well that the water might be polluted because direct water supply is practically non-existent.

Compounding the situation is the inefficient system of garbage disposal. A Delhi administration official admitted that there was not a single waste recycling plant in the city because of the enormous cost involved. And, in the entire trans-Yamuna area where two-thirds of the population resides, there are only three garbage landfills, with one collection bin for every 500 plots or 3,500 people. Sabir Ali points out that hygiene in this area was 'deplorable' with more than 40 per cent of the garbage strewn around in parks, outside houses and in drains. "The low rate of clearance, foul smell, mosquito breeding, are bound to lead to several diseases," he has said in a study.

**I**t is a vicious circle. The administration is unable to provide facilities to the existing population. And, the population is constantly increasing at an estimated 3 lakh every year. Most of the population increase is confined to the "slum areas." According to the Institute of Urban Affairs, the annual rate of growth in squatter colonies was 11.8 per cent as compared to the 4.5 per cent for the city as a whole.

Worse, for more than 25 lakh people living way across the river, falling prey to all kinds of diseases is a way of life. If not cholera or gastro enteritis, they are in constant danger of stomach ailments, malaria and other "hygiene-oriented" diseases.

There is an inherent flaw in the area, said Ali. The 1,000 hectare "Yamuna bowl" is nearly 10 to 12 feet lower than the river bed and is consequently prone to water logging and seepage. In fact, the original master plan of the city had earmarked the entire area as a "shikarbagh", a green belt on the periphery of the city. Studies had also proved that the bowl could not be drained.

It was chosen to be developed only on the basis of an "utterly untenable" idea, the syphon system which would



**Choked drains in one of Delhi's resettlement colonies: unhygienic conditions**

drain the entire area of its sullage and storm water into adjoining Uttar Pradesh. The plan fell through for obvious reasons. First, Uttar Pradesh refused. Second, and perhaps more important, the scheme, costing Rs 500

**Jhuggis have sprouted all over Delhi: cause for concern**



crores was discarded due to financial constraints. So, in the absence of any siphon system, garbage disposal is almost non-existent. Inevitably, the "prolonged accumulation" of garbage results in clogging and, with every rain the garbage sweeps into the water bed below, polluting the water. With groundwater the primary source of water, disease is only an inevitability.

Notwithstanding these well-known facts, however, more than 6,00,000 people were shifted to this area during the Emergency when squatters were rehabilitated in the then far-flung resettlement colonies. The trend to shift to east Delhi with its comparatively low land prices continues.

Either way, with the administration's effort or without it, an epidemic in the city is a near certainty. "You can reduce the intensity of an epidemic. But, you can't eradicate it completely," predicted Ali. That such abysmal conditions should exist in the showplace of the country is really ironic. But what is worse is that so many people were allowed, even encouraged to move into that part of the city which is just not habitable. ●

**Minu Jain/New Delhi**



# IN THE NAME OF RAM

*Arthur Bonner on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy*



*Averting The Apocalypse*  
Social Movements In India  
Today by Arthur Bonner  
Published by Duke University  
Press 1990

Arthur Bonner, former Asia correspondent of New York Times, writes about a society on the verge of an apocalyptic upheaval. Author of *Among the Afghans*, Bonner travelled extensively through India, interviewing those at the bottom of the country's social structure, and found hope only in the social movements which are working towards changes to avert an explosion.

This extract from *Averting The Apocalypse - Social Movements In India Today* recounts the genesis of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, and more.

**M**anipulating symbols and myths and searching for scapegoats is a way to try to create solidarity and commitment in the face of deteriorating economic and political life. The Nazis and Fascists did this in Europe, but it is perilous, as the fate of Germany and Italy demonstrated.

The conversion of an insignificant number of Dalits in Meenakshipuram was perceived by upper caste Hindus as a portent, along with the rise of regional, linguistic political parties, of a weakening of Brahminic hegemony. In 1982, at a meeting attended by leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it was decided there was an urgent need to stimulate Hindu unity. The instrument chosen for this effort was an RSS front group, the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP, roughly, World Hindu Congress).

The RSS itself was formed in 1925 to assert the right of Hindus to set the policies and



agenda for India after the departure of the British. It was banned in 1948 on suspicion of participation in a conspiracy to assassinate Mahatma Gandhi, but many second-ranking Congress Party leaders had a long and close association with the RSS, and the ban was lifted after a year when no direct connection was proved.

The VHP was organised in 1964 with three ostensible goals: to consolidate and strengthen Hindu society to protect and spread Hindu ethical and spiritual values and make them relevant to contemporary society, and to establish links with Hindus in foreign countries.

Little of this was actively pursued particularly the development of a corpus of modern doctrines. Instead, the VHP concentrated on campaigns to prevent Hindu girls from marrying non-Hindus and to reconvert Christians and Muslims to Hinduism by building





AYODHYA, INDIA

temples and proselytizing tribals in the north-east and the Chotanagpur region of Bihar

### Liberating God's Birthplace

It was so successful, the VHP decided, as a sequel, to demand the "liberation" of three legendary temples from Muslim control. They claimed a mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, built in 1528 by Babar, the first Mogul emperor, was on the site of a temple marking the spot where the god Rama was born. They said a second mosque, built in 1661 by the sixth Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb, at Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, replaced a temple marking the birthplace of the god Krishna. Both Rama and Krishna are avatars of Vishnu, one of the two most important Hindu deities. The third mosque is in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh—the holiest of Hindu cities. It was built by Aurangzeb in

1669 on the site of the Vishvanath temple of Siva, the other important Hindu deity.

Uttar Pradesh, with 130 million people, is India's most populous state and the center of ancient Hindu culture. It is also the heartland of Muslim India. One-quarter of all Indian Muslims live in Uttar Pradesh, and it is the home of Urdu, the closest approximate to a national language for Indian Muslims. Jawaharlal Nehru, whose family home was in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, spoke fine Urdu and broken Hindi and delighted in the Islamic culture of his native soil. The high-buttoned, knee-length *achkan* jacket he made a male national costume is in Muslim style.

The VHP selected the mosque at Ayodhya as the prime target. Ayodhya is a *tirtha* on the bank of the holy river Sarayu. Literally, *tirtha* means the ford of a river. Metaphysically, it is a place where a person crosses a river descending from heaven and makes contact with

**A devotee dressed as Hanuman leads a procession: stoking passions**



the ancestral world. It is also home for once-peripatetic Ramanandi sadhus now settled down to a sedentary life, allowing pilgrims to acquire merit by bestowing alms on them.

### The British Try to Keep the Peace

As centuries passed Ayodhya attracted an increasing number of ascetic, drug-addicted, and volatile Hindu and Muslim holy men, virtually identical in their ecstasies but distinguishable in doctrine and dress or, to be more precise, absence of dress, since the Ramanandi flaunted their total renunciation by wearing no clothes.

After the British annexed the then Muslim principality of Awadh (or Oudh, a corruption of Ayodhya) in 1856, they found themselves arbiters of clashes between the two groups. They first built a railing around the Babri Mosque (as it is called) to keep Hindus out, but after more clashes Hindus and Muslims were allowed to offer prayers in separate arched chambers of the building.

This harmony was shattered with the pre-independence rise of aggressive Hinduism, which used the cow as a symbol of unity against the beef-eating British and Muslims. The "cow protection" movement inspired noisy processions and confrontations with Muslims in many parts of India, including Ayodhya. There was a strong Hindu attack on the Babri Mosque during the Muslim festival of Bakr-Id in 1912 and another attack in 1934, in which the mosque was heavily damaged, and several hundred Muslims were killed.

The departure of the British offered an opportunity to challenge the status quo. On the night of December 22-23, 1949, despite the presence of guards, an idol of Rama appeared in the inner chamber where Hindus were allowed to offer prayers. Although local Hindus claimed it was a miraculous appearance, it was a patent Hindu attempt to seize the mosque under cover of the partition disturbances. A magistrate avoided further trouble by confiscating the property and locking the gate to keep everyone out.

It was not a total loss for the Hindus. They were granted the right to hold continuous *kirtans* (song sessions) on a cement platform known as the Ram *Chabutra* (Platform) and to take *darshan* (the viewing of a deity) of the idol through a window from a specified distance away.

In May 1983, at a meeting attended by leaders of eighty-five of the main Hindu sects, it was agreed the RSS, acting through the VHP, would conduct an *Ekatmata Yajna* (Sacrifice for Unanimity or Rite for Integration).

It was the sort of thing the RSS did best. It is organized on military lines, although its members are armed only with lathis. Dressed in khaki shorts and white shirts and wearing saffron-coloured caps, they daily gather on



an open field in neat lines with their lathis at their sides, salute a saffron flag, and go through a series of drills and exercises after which they listen to a speech, generally warning of the threats to Hinduism.

The *Ekatmata Yajna* consisted of three main *yatras* (marches or processions). One started from the Pashupatinath Temple in Katmandu and ended at the Rameswaram Temple in Tamil Nadu at the southern tip of India. A second made the north-south journey along another route, from the pilgrimage center of Hardwar in the foothills of the Himalayas to Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. The third traveled from Gangasagar in West Bengal to the Somnath temple in Gujarat.

The *yajna* honoured Bharat Mata (Mother India) deified as a goddess clad in a modest sari and seated on the back of a lion. Another symbol was the Ganga, the mother of all waters in heaven and on earth. In each *yatra* a truck carried an eight-foot-high bronze *kalasha* (container) of water drawn from the headwaters of the Ganga or substitute sacred sources. Along the way the devout offered pitchers of water from local sacred sources, like the tank of a temple, to be poured into the *kalasha*. Plastic bottles of the mingled waters were sold to raise money for the *yajna*.

There were also fifty-three *upayatras* (shorter marches) and in less than a month 300,000 of India's half-million villages were visited.

**The drive to liberate Ram's birthplace was resumed in March 1985, when 60,000 Hindus gathered at New Delhi's Ram Lila Grounds**





**A VHP rally at the Boat Club: nothing succeeds like religious excess**

Villagers, mostly women and girls, brought their local water and stood with folded hands before a picture of Bharat Mata as a loud-speaker blared a taped hymn to the Ganga. The few who could afford it bought bottles of the combined waters for ten rupees, but most settled for a lithograph of Bharat Mata for half a rupee.

In Hindu cosmology existence is a vast cycle divided into four *yugas* (periods). Rama lived in the *Treta* or second period, which lasted 1,296,000 years, at the end of which Ayodhya disappeared. According to myth, it was rediscovered in this present *Kali Yuga* of strife and toil by a king named Vikramaditya, who is said to have reigned in the first century B.C. Although there is no factual evidence of his existence, he ranked high in ancient esteem and later rulers took his name, just as in Europe Caesar's name became a term for German kings.

What may have happened is this: an upstart kingdom of the Gupta clan emerged in north central India in the fifth century A.D., when Buddhism was in decline and what we now perceive as Hinduism was taking form. As part of this churning, an early Gupta king took the name Vikramaditya and built his capital on a bank of the Sarayu and called it

Ayodhya, after the kingdom of a mythical *Treta* era-ruler Rama. Vikramaditya Gupta then built a temple on the exact spot where, so he claimed, Rama was born millions of years earlier, thus linking his dynasty with the gods.

It is a mythic hodgepodge. Rama is said to be a northern prince whose wife, Sita, is kidnapped by the demon king Ravana of modern Sri Lanka. Sita is rescued by Rama with the help of an army of monkeys. However, in earlier myths that migrated to Indonesia, Ravana is a wise and beneficent king. Does the Rama story signify the victory of a northern king over a southern king, perhaps in the mountains of central India and not all the way to Sri Lanka? This is the interpretation of modern Dalits who claim the legend depicts the Brahminic destruction of earlier civilisations.

With the decline of the Guptas toward the end of the fifth century, Ayodhya was abandoned and reclaimed by jungle vines but retained its religious attraction. When Babar passed through the region in 1528, he was approached by two *pirs* (Muslim saints) who, in Indian syncretic tradition, were impressed by the holiness of the place and persuaded the emperor to build a mosque on the site of one of the surviving temples. In the same syncretic tradition Hindus continued to worship by tossing flowers into a pit said to be the spot of Rama's birth.

In the Indian tradition of not trying to solve explosive issues, the gate remained padlocked for thirty-four years. Then the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh decided to use the mosque to revive memories of purported past Muslim oppression. In October 1984 they formed the *Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yajna* (Sacrifice for the Liberation of Rama's Birthplace) Committee and announced a *Tala Khola* (Open the Lock) campaign to raise 250 million rupees (\$17.5 million) to construct a new temple on the spot.

It took a full year to work out the showmanship of *rath yatras* (temple processions in which the deity is taken through the street in a "chariot") in which villagers would be shown Rama behind a padlocked iron gate. God was in prison and had to be liberated. But the campaign was canceled two weeks after its start because of the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984.

### **A Hindu Coup d'Etat**

The drive to liberate Rama's birthplace was resumed in March 1985, when sixty thousand Hindus gathered at New Delhi's Ram Lila Grounds, where every year huge bamboo and paper images of Ravana and two other "demons" are burned with fiery arrows shot by Rama and his companions. A pamphlet read:

Three prominent places of Hindu faith...have yet to be liberated even after thirty-

**It took a full year to work out the showmanship of *rath yatras*, in which villagers would be shown Ram behind a padlocked iron gate: God was in prison and had to be liberated**



eight years of independence. The status quo remains despite hundreds of thousands of sacrifices. The original birthplaces of the gods of millions and millions of Hindus and their places of worship which were captured and decimated by the invaders are still in alien hands. It is an attack on the identity of the society, a black spot on its manhood and a dark page in its glorious history. As long as these three black spots are not removed, the Hindu mind cannot feel peace and satisfaction and would continue to writhe in pain and distress of dishonor.

The following October twenty-five *rath yatras* were set in motion to revive the Open the Lock agitation and collect money to "educate the masses about the struggle."

On February 1, 1986, a judge in Ayodhya, with no prior notice or hearing, ended centuries of debate by ordering the locks removed from the entrance gate of the Babri Mosque. He claimed to be acting on the application of a local lawyer who had pointed out the order locking the gates was legally invalid. Journalists dismissed the judge's excuse out-of-hand, saying nothing the lower courts do in India is without the approval of dominant castes and politicians. Muslims in Ayodhya called it a "judicial coup d'état," noting that paramilitary forces were deployed before the order was issued. And newsmen learned Bir Bahadur Singh, the Congress Party chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, had visited Ayodhya during a Hindu fair in December and had met Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders. He had then called for the legal file to look into the very issue the lawyer raised: was there a specific court order regarding the padlocking of the gates?

Once the gates were flung open, Hindus flocked inside with lamps, garlands, sweets, and coconuts to worship the idol they believed marked the spot where Rama was born. Then, in effect, the central government in New Delhi added its stamp of approval. *Doordarshan* ("far-seen," the Sanskritized official name for the government-owned television network) and the government's All-India Radio broadcast the news nationwide, showing the convergence of worshippers into what was described as the Ram Janmabhoomi temple. The name of Babri Mosque had disappeared.

### The Peepul Tree of Old Delhi

Among the many trees and plants that Hindus hold sacred is the *pipal* (spelled peepul in English). It is also known as the Bo tree. It was under a Bo tree that Prince Siddhartha meditated, found enlightenment, and became the Buddha. When Hinduism absorbed Buddhism, the peepul was associated with Vishnu and Siva, and no one was allowed to harm it. There is also a belief that if a woman worships the tree and ties a thread around it, she will give birth to a son.



There is a peepul tree on *Lal Kuan* (Red Street) in the old walled city of Delhi. The area is predominantly Muslim, and few people paid much attention to it until the early 1960s, when Hindu midwives began bringing pregnant women to offer prayers and tie a thread around it. This brought the tree to the attention of Hindus in the local government, and after some resistance from Muslim leaders, who pointed out the tree stood on ground owned by a Muslim charitable trust, it was agreed Hindus could build a platform around the base of the tree and place an idol on it.

In 1984 RSS activists tried to build a wall around the tree, but a local official, a Sikh, intervened, and the wall was demolished. However, when the Sikh official was transferred, no one in authority was willing to listen to Muslim objections, and the RSS built a small temple next to the tree and installed a full-time *pujari* (priest, one who accepted offerings).

Two weeks after the Babri Mosque was turned over to Hindus, Muslims staged a show of strength at the *Juma Masjid* (Friday Mosque) opposite the Red Fort in Old Delhi. The seventeenth-century mosque, set on a high plinth with a delicate dome of white marble with reddish-brown stripes, is the largest in India, with a *sahn* (courtyard) that can easily

**The VHP was so successful that it decided to demand the "liberation" of three legendary temples from Muslim control. The temples were in Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi**





**Members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad: agitating for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya**

accommodate twenty thousand of the faithful. On this Friday, January 11, it was filled to capacity.

*Imam* (prayer leader) Maulana Abdullah Bukhari spoke of the grievances of Muslims in India but cautioned the struggle was with the government and not with ordinary Hindus. He asked the faithful to return to their homes peacefully and not shout slogans. Volunteers at the exits repeated the injunctions to leave peacefully.

In the surrounding old city Muslim shops had downed their shutters, and some houses flew black flags as signs of protest. Hindu and Sikh businesses also closed, and people remained indoors as armed police patrols marched through the narrow, winding streets. There were a few minor clashes, rocks were thrown, and the police fired several shots to disperse crowds, but no one was injured.

But there was tension at the peepul tree of *Lal Kuan*. Overnight someone had stretched a banner near the tree reading "*Prachi Shiv Mandir*" (Ancient Siva Temple), and there was a poster congratulating Hindus on the liberation of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple. Local people tried to get the police to remove

the banner and poster, saying it was a provocation, but the police refused.

Then, about 350 Muslims, mostly young men, came shouting slogans, and a police jeep, under the command of Station House Officer Jag Parvesh Kaushal, overtook them. People in the surrounding houses later said Kaushal shouted anti-Muslim epithets, ordering the marchers to disperse. He also fired shots in the air with his pistol, and there was a stampede away from the jeep. The police followed the crowd, some firing shots in the air.

Two men, Suban Hashmi, twenty, and Mohammed Zakir, eighteen, turned into a blind alley. Kaushal, following them, turned the corner and ordered a constable to shoot them with his rifle. When the constable refused, Kaushal took the rifle and fired two shots, killing one and mortally wounding the other, who died two days later at a hospital.

The police later charged rioters had burned vehicles and looted shops. A general curfew was imposed on Old Delhi, and for the next six days police ranged through the streets and into houses and restaurants apparently picking up people at random. In all more than eight hundred persons were arrested, almost all of them Muslims.

When the curfew was lifted, investigators from the People's Union for Civil Liberties went through the area, gathering evidence of what happened. They saw no burned vehicles, and no merchants said their shops had been looted. The team also interviewed some of those who had been arrested.

Mohammed Nasir, twenty-two, said police were suspicious of those who gave Hindu names, and men were made to open their trousers to see if they had been circumcised. Another man, Zamiruddin, said he was beaten about the head and had to be taken to a hospital for stitches. He said the officers who beat him kept asking, "Why don't you people go away to Pakistan? Why should you continue to stay here?"

Police, searching a bus, saw a man named Zamiruddin and recognised him by his clothes as a visitor from Pakistan. He was taken to a station house, beaten so badly he had to be hospitalised, and five hundred Indian rupees along with twenty-five American dollars and a wristwatch were stolen from him.

Mohammed Asif, twenty-four, was beaten for an hour. When he asked for water, a police officer said he should be given urine to drink. He was taken to a hospital where his wounds were dressed and then back to the police station where he was told to clean the latrine. He refused, but when he gave the police fifty rupees, they let him go.

A Mrs Zubeida said police broke into her house and struck her twice on the chest with the metal end of a lathi, and one officer shouted, "Dogs, why don't you go to Pakistan? You are illegitimate in our country."

**Two weeks after the Babri Mosque was turned over to the Hindus, Muslims staged a show of strength at the Juma Masjid in Old Delhi**



# Day of the underdogs

*Less fancied teams steal the show in the initial round of the World Cup*

**E**xtraordinary, exciting and excruciating—that could well sum up the first six days of the fourteenth World Cup soccer competition, which kicked off to a grand start in Italy a couple of weeks ago. One does not really know what to expect in the days ahead. And, the football fever, which has gripped the millions of soccer-crazy fans the world over, shows no signs of letting up.

The euphoria of several teams in this 24-nation tournament might have evaporated by the time this appears in print. But in the days immediately after the start of the world's most gruelling game of nerves, brawn and brain,

**West Germany's Lothar Matthaeus: the anchorman of the team**



the so-called babes of soccer have established a fact that Europe and Latin America had refused to recognise. Third World soccer has finally come of age.

Even before the memory of a glittering opening ceremony had faded, unpretentious Cameroon took champions Argentina by storm. But it wasn't as if the swarthy West Africans bulldozed their way through the opposition. They were calm and their deceptively languid approach only served to lull their opponents, led by arguably the world's best footballer, Diego Maradona. Fifteen minutes into the game and the world sat up to accept the latest entrants to big-time soccer.

In 1982, Cameroon had played in the final rounds of the World Cup in Spain, but their inability to score and consequent exit in the first round created only a ripple which was soon forgotten. But this time, they had obviously come prepared. Cameroon's victory is being belittled in some quarters—especially by European news agency reporters. References were made to witchcraft and voodoo. Newspapers blindly reprinting such stories are doing a disservice to football, especially as played in Africa. The so-called pundits of soccer had failed to assess the potential of players in that part of the world, which is why they were trying to find excuses for the fall of the mighty.

But statistics have proved that in their match with Argentina, Cameroon had 54 per cent of the exchanges which, though not an infallible guide to supremacy on the field, did prove that the Africans were fighting on equal terms. In terms of both ball control and positional play, they were no inferior to the world champions. What they did was to bottle up Maradona—who played into their hands by waiting for passes and receiving the

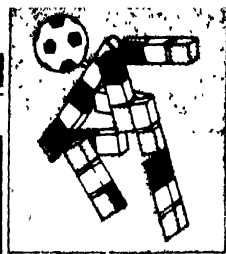


ball facing his own goal, instead of taking the ball from lower down and working his way up. Some of the tactics employed to contain Maradona may have been questionable, but in today's soccer, tough tackling has come to be accepted as part of the game. And Maradona is no stranger to this. In 1982, players repeatedly hacked away at him until, in exasperation, he retaliated—only to be sent off the field. In 1986, he survived the tackles and kept his cool. And his team won the cup. But in the opening match of 1990, Argentina never functioned as a team.

Even as Cameroon's victory was being written off as a flash in the pan, the recently "freed" Romania stormed the USSR citadel to win 2-0. The erstwhile 'Big Brother' could have suffered an even more ignominious defeat as the Romanians wasted a couple of chances. Although, in fairness to the luckless Soviet squad, one must emphasise that the second goal against them was the referee's gift (there was no penalty, from which Lacatus converted his second goal), the fact remains that the USSR was outplayed by a team given no chance to qualify for the second round. So, after the first two days, all calculations for Group-B were proved wrong, as Romania headed this section of the competition, followed by Cameroon, both with two points each.

The 24 teams qualifying from among 112 participating countries (of





**The West German team: beginning on a promising note**

which two were given direct entries, holders Argentina and hosts Italy), have been divided into six groups of four teams each. The first two of each and the four best-placed number three teams from the six groups will play in the pre-quarter finals—at which stage the competition changes from league to straight knock-out.

In what is the weakest group—for which the hosts were roundly criticised—Italy and Czechoslovakia were on course for the next round, with convincing victories over Austria and fledgling USA. But the fortunes in Group-A were totally different from those in Group-C, where the rock-like Juan Amaldo Cayasso gave Costa Rica the rare distinction of winning the opening match of their first World Cup campaign. The victim was Scotland, a country which has the dubious distinction of never reaching the second round, despite this being their fifth consecutive entry into the competition proper. But Costa Rica also has to contend with the likes of the world's finest exponents of entertaining soccer, Brazil, and a tough, determined Sweden.

Although history says that West Germany cannot win the cup until the caravan moves to the United States in 1994, the team under the tutelage of the legendary Franz Beckenbauer

started their campaign in Italy in a startling manner. They pulverised the Yugoslavs, winning 4-1 and stunning the world with their exceptionally forceful and authoritative play. West Germany is the only nation to have figured in the final of five World Cup competitions, but they have won twice, in 1954 and 1974. However, their first match this time seemed to suggest that they are set on breaking

**Costa Rica's Juan Amaldo Cayasso: a star performer**



the 20-year-old jinx. And in this group, Columbia convincingly overrode the opposition put up by the United Arab Emirates, which was the only side to play like amateurs.

In the fifth group, last year's surprise semi-finalists Belgium set a cracking pace against a lack-lustre South Korea, the top Asian nation to qualify. Although the latter had a great track-record, leading the 25-nation preliminary competition and scoring 30 goals, conceding one in 11 matches overall, it cut a sorry figure in the world forum. Conversely, the other two contenders from the group, Spain and Uruguay battled to an exciting finish—the latter playing better, but missing a penalty to earn a draw.

But it was in the last group that one saw the biggest surprise of the 1990 finals. Unheralded Egypt, considered pushovers in a group which had the Netherlands, England and Ireland, had only themselves to blame for not being able to beat the Dutch. In a match that saw the likes of the most fearsome trio in the world of football—Ruud Gullit, Van Basten and Frank Rijkaard—coming up a cropper. It was only the over-enthusiasm and inexperience of the Egyptians, who last played in the premier competition in 1934, that the Dutch escaped with a draw. Earlier, England queered their own pitch by failing to counter the Irish strategy of the long-ball game where almost every counter-attack came through long passes. They were lucky to finish their match on level terms with their neighbours.

However, once the first round of league matches were over, the seasoned campaigners seemed to get down to business. Putting in a vastly-improved performance, Argentina overcame a frenetic but very erratic Soviet challenge to win 2-0. The USSR, however, were unlucky in not forging ahead despite their misses. In fact, a whole chapter could be written about the injustices heaped on the Soviet Union in successive World Cup competitions. The latest in line being the denial of a penalty by an inept referee, when Argentina had not scored. But that is another story.

Overall, the fourteenth World Cup promises to go down in history as, perhaps, the best ever in terms of competitive soccer. It has marked the beginning of a new era in world football—but, there is time yet for a final verdict.

**Arijt Sen**



# ***Sportsworld regrets***

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## Church music

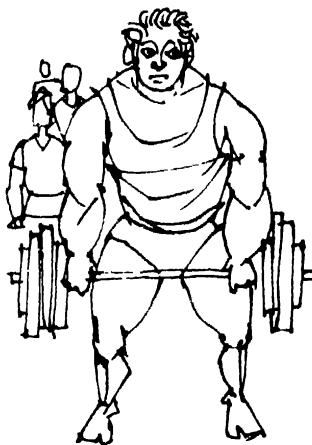
■ His efforts didn't go unnoticed Father Joseph Palackal, a priest from Kerala, has been tirelessly trying to bring back the classical tradition in Indian church music. As an honour to his contribution, the priest has been asked to perform in New York's famous Broadway Theatre this month.

Fr Palackal, presently doing his post graduation in ethnomusicology in the City University of New York, is scheduled to appear in eight shows in a musical comedy

## Old is bronze

■ Most men on reaching the age of 40, experience what psychiatrists call the "mid-life crisis". But not Ramesh K. Kanchan. At the age of 44, he has powered his way to glory. On his first visit abroad, Kanchan finished third in the 1990 Asia-Oceanic International Powerlifting Meet to win the bronze medal.

The former bodybuilder and the Mr Bombay of



1972-73 is currently sweating it out in a Bombay gymnasium to have a go at another title at the Asian powerlifting meet to be held in Taiwan this month. Whether he succeeds or not, Kanchan has certainly outshone the Jumping Jack Jeetendras of the 30 Plus ad. And that too, when he is actually 40 plus.

## Teenage genius

■ One has heard of child prodigies but surely no one has heard of a 17-year-old doctor? Born in Vellore, Balamurali Krishna Ambati, a third year pre-med student at New York University, would like to be a doctor at 17. The story of Balamurali's god-gifted talent made front-page news in one of America's leading dailies.

Balamurali, who has been inspired by the *Gunniss Book of World Records* five years ago, is all set to become the

youngest graduate of medical school ever. His record will eclipse the one held by an Israeli who graduated from Ferugia



University in Italy at the age of 18. According to *The New York Times*, if Bala keeps up his current pace, he could graduate just two months short of his 18th birthday. Good luck to Bala.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ANUPRAY

## THIS INDIA

**RAIPUR:** The long veils worn by two Hindu brides resulted in their getting bridegrooms they had not bargained for. Two separate marriage parties reached Patan village near Ajot in Durg district, at the same time. In order to get the ceremony completed in a hurry, the younger bride moved around the sacred fire seven times along with the bridegroom meant for the other bride. The older bride went through the same process with the younger groom. The village elders contended that since the ceremonies were over, there could be no exchange of life partners—*The Times of India* (S.C. Malhotra, Anand).



**BHOPAL:** In a novel form of protest, Ramlakhan Sharma, a Janata Dal legislator representing Sirmour Assembly constituency, has decided to wear just his

underwear to highlight the plight of the people in the drought-ridden Rewa district. According to sources, Sharma clad in his green knee-length underwear alleged that the BJP government in the state had neglected Rewa district, resulting in drought and the unavailability of drinking water—*The Statesman* (Amiya Kumar Ghosh, Calcutta).

**MADRAS:** Five girls in their twenties taught an eve-teaser a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. According to the police, 23-year-old Raja, had been teasing one of the girls, Kausalya, for over a week. Undaunted, Kausalya took a five-woman force to corner Raja. Together they beat him up and then handed him over to the police—*Deccan Chronicle* (A.V. Ramamurthy, New Delhi).

**PATNA:** Unemployed business management diploma-holders here, have been on an indefinite *dharna* near the JP square for a month, demanding immediate absorption. Like the agitating engineers in the state who were hawking and begging on streets to protest against their unemployment, the MBAs are pulling *rickshaws* and polishing shoes to protest against government inaction—*The Telegraph* (D.J. Patro, Bhubaneswar) ●



# SUNDAY WEEK

BEGINNING 24 JUNE 1990 BY AMRITLAL

## ARIES (21 March—20 April)



Most of you will gain substantially through inheritance. Businessmen should look forward to a profitable week. Students will receive awards. Courtship and matrimony are in the offing.

**Good dates:** 24, 25 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 6

**Favourable direction:** South

## TAURUS (21 April—20 May)



Make hay while the sun shines. Friends and relatives will contribute to your happiness. A promotion is likely for those in service. Businessmen will prosper. However, this is not a time to settle legal issues.

**Good dates:** 26, 27 and 28

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 2 and 4

**Favourable direction:** North

## GEMINI (21 May—20 June)



This week you should be cautious in all your dealings. Be on the guard against deceit. Be patient and tactful with your friends and colleagues. Keep an eye on your health. Romance is not well indicated.

**Good dates:** 25, 26 and 29

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 5 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## CANCER (21 June—20 July)



This is not a favourable week for you. You will face a lot of problems but do not lose heart. Businessmen should not enter into new contracts. Professionals should avoid any kind of controversy.

**Good dates:** 24, 28 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 5 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## LEO (21 July—20 August)



This week your stars are favourable. Some of you will inherit property and most of your legal problems will be solved. You will also be able to repay your debts. Romance is in the offing.

**Good dates:** 28, 29 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 3, 5 and 6

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## VIRGO (21 August—20 September)



A fair measure of success and good fortune is in store for some of you. Others will benefit through the offices of those in authority. An excellent week for those in service. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 27, 28 and 29

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 4 and 5

**Favourable direction:** East

## LIBRA (21 September—20 October)



Your affairs will make steady progress this week. This period is favourable for matters relating to property. A promotion is likely for the employed. Businessmen should embark on new ventures.

**Good dates:** 26, 28 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 2, 6 and 7

**Favourable direction:** West

## SCORPIO (21 October—20 November)



This week will be a fairly lucky one. Sportsmen will win prizes. Professionals might go abroad on assignment. You will progress in all fields of activities. The time is ripe for speculation and gambling.

**Good dates:** 24, 26 and 28

**Lucky numbers:** 5, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** North-west

## SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)



Financially, this is a very lucky week. Businessmen may embark on new ventures. Professionals may have to make important changes in their careers. A change of residence is indicated.

**Good dates:** 25, 28 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 4, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South

## CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)



This is going to be an auspicious week for you. Expansion in business is indicated. A secret association will be extremely helpful. Professionals are likely to be admired. The period is favourable for love and matrimony.

**Good dates:** 26, 29 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 1, 6 and 8

**Favourable direction:** East

## AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)



Businessmen should devote more time to their work. Your confidence will see you through. A favourable week for professionals and artists. Social engagements will keep you busy. The domestic front looks peaceful.

**Good dates:** 28, 29 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 6, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** South-west

## PISCES (21 February—20 March)



This is going to be a hectic week for you. Businessmen might enter into new contracts. Those in service should be cautious in their dealings. Romance is not well indicated. Keep an eye on your health.

**Good dates:** 27, 28 and 30

**Lucky numbers:** 7, 8 and 9

**Favourable direction:** East

## STAR PARTNERS: LIBRA—VIRGO

*The Libra woman's love for animals is not shared by the Virgo man. He is a perfectionist and even a minor slip by her is bound to irritate him. The partners must make efforts to keep the relationship going.*



## Stalemate

Does anybody remember Sanjay Singh, the Raja of Amethi, relative of V.P. Singh and near-martyr of the last general election?

When Singh returned from medical treatment in London (he was accompanied by V.P. Singh's Yuvraj Ajaya Singh and the Dal government picked up the tab), it was believed that he would get a prize assignment. In fact, the Delhi circuit was certain that he would relieve Arif Mohammad Khan of the civil aviation ministry.

In fact, Singh got nothing. He was not even elected to the Rajya Sabha and no ministership has been forthcoming. Despite this, he remains extraordinarily close to the Raja and the Rani.

So, what's going on? Apparently, V.P. Singh wants Sanjay Singh to re-



**Sanjay Singh: delayed entry**

turn to UP and take on Mulayam Singh Yadav who is getting a little too powerful for the Raja's liking. But Sanjay would much rather come to the Centre and accept a berth in the Cabinet.

So, a stalemate persists.

## More Sheld than Mufti

Will Farooq Abdullah return to the helm of affairs in Kashmir? Preliminary indications are that the good doctor, who

HEARD AT THE INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

**How can this government support culture when the only culture the deputy prime minister believes in is agriculture.**

A FRUSTRATED MEMBER OF INTACH



**Farooq Abdullah (right): lobbying for the Mufti**

flew to New York from his home in Essex last week, wants to have nothing to do with the present mess.

He knows that even if he does become chief minister, he can neither guarantee stability nor offer the people of his state the kind



of independence they are demanding.

Farooq is believed to have been slightly keen on getting involved when George Fernandes approached him. But after 'Dynamite George' got the boot even that little enthu-

siasm evaporated.

His current position is as follows: as the government claims that the Kashmir problem is his fault, he is clearly not in a position to salvage the situation. On the other hand, within the Cabinet itself there sits a man whose influence on the Kashmiri masses is immense, whose reputation for sagacity and statesmanship know no bounds, and who is a noted administrative genius. The best thing would be to make this man the next CM.

And who is this latter-day Sheikh Abdullah?

Why? Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, of course!

Obviously, Farooq has a sense of humour.

## Look, no Rajiv!

The Congress party claims that its president Rajiv Gandhi is no longer an electoral liability,



**Rajiv Gandhi: conspicuous by his absence**

and that he is on the verge of making a comeback.

But if that is true, then why was there no mention of Gandhi in the Congress campaign for the elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation? Not one candidate of the party had a picture of the benignly-smiling Rajiv on his election posters—though many of them made do with his mother, Indira, instead.

It seems that—as far as the West Bengal unit of the party is concerned at least—Rajiv Gandhi is a non-person.

## THERMOMETER

*Chaudhary and friends—and enemies*



**Arun Nehru:** The Tau's hatred of him has been fanned by V.P. Singh. And now things have reached the point of no return. Lal believes Nehru pushed for Chautala's ouster.



**R.K. Hegde:** Lal sees him as V.P. Singh's *chamcha* and is convinced that by destroying Hegde he is destroying the Raja.



**Ajit Singh:** The Chaudhary and Singh keep trying to make up, but their support bases are too similar. And conflict is inevitable.



**S.R. Bommal:** Hates Hegde, likes Chandra Shekhar and is now beginning to become the Tau's man.



**Chandra Shekhar:** Lal lied to Shekhar to make V.P. Singh Prime Minister, but Shekhar hates the Raja so much that he is even willing to forgive the Tau to get his back on VPS.



## First Munna, then AKN

By the time this appears in print you will know whether Maneka Gandhi has resigned. But guess who the freckled bear-napper blames for her sins?

Not Nilamani Routray, the alleged "vegetable" who suddenly grew into a shark. Not V.P. Singh who still retains a special place in her heart.

No, the other Mrs Gandhi says it is all Arun Nehru's fault. According to



**Maneka Gandhi: taking on Arun Nehru**

Maneka, her late husband's burly cousin has propounded a new growth-at-any-cost philosophy for the regime and the environment is the first victim.

Besides, say friends of the personable Munna-jailer, Arun Nehru has always resented her right from the day she walked out of his aunt's house

## Tau vs tap

Why does Devi Lal hate Hegde so much? After all, the smooth, suave chairman of the Planning Commission has done him no harm. Then why did the Tau make sneering references to Hegde's "conscience" and wonder if it told him to resign?

Apparently, this has little to do with Hegde himself.

HEARD AT 10 JANPATH

**He is fast becoming the man of a thousand caps.**

A CONGRESS(I) LEADER, COMMENTING ON THE RAJA'S FREQUENT CHANGES OF HEADGEAR

The Tau believes that V.P. Singh is out to get him. He thinks that the Raja is too shrewd to go for him in person and so, will launch oblique attacks. According to the Tau, this is the evidence:

- The first *Indian Express* article which quoted him as using four letter words against Arun Nehru was V.P. Singh's way of driving a rift between Nehru and him.

- The second piece, after Meham II, was also inspired by the Raja in the hope of creating a climate of public opinion that would enable the PM to ask for Chautala's resignation.

- Then, Hegde was put on the job and told to engineer a few resignations from the Planning Commission to put pressure on Chautala. L.C. Jain's was the first—and once Chautala resigned, Hegde allowed Jain

## PASTIMES

*What they do when they're not politicking*

- **Rajiv Gandhi:** PHOTOGRAPHY. Was gifted a camera by former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone which he puts to good use. Takes colour bromides of family and scenery

- **V.P. Singh:** POETRY. In keeping with his introverted personality, the Raja stays away from group activity and sets his thoughts down in Hindi verse.

- **Maneka Gandhi:** GARDENING. Has a green thumb. Can make flowers grow out of rock. But pity any bears who might be around

- **Mufti Mohammad Sayeed:** GOLF. His detractors portray him as a hookah-smoking rustic. But in fact he is an urban sophisticate who likes nothing more than a game of golf

- **Ramakrishna Hegde:** WESTERN MOVIES. Long before the video revolution, Hegde used to find friends with foreign film companies who would arrange private screenings of films that would never find public viewing in India—including Bernardo Bertolucci's *La Luna*.

- **Sharad Pawar:** KABADDI. Travels the world in his capacity as an office-bearer of the Kabaddi Association and is said to have made remarkable progress in such centres of the sport as Las Vegas and Monte Carlo

- **Madhavrao Scindia:** CRICKET. Keeps organising MPs vs First Eleven matches at Scindia School. No truth to the rumour that every time he hits the ball, a terrified fielder is obliged to kick it to the boundary.

to withdraw the resignation.

In getting at Hegde (just as he keeps lambasting the *Express*) the Tau believes that he is neutralising V.P. Singh's proxies. The *Express*, he claims, was once seen as the voice of the Janata Dal. Now, he says, it is seen as the paper of a faction within the Dal. Similarly, Hegde was perceived as an intellectual messiah. Now, he's just another discredited politico clinging on to his chair.

Say this for the Tau: the old buffer knows what he is up to.

## I Love Credit Suzy

It is now no secret that the Hindujas are basing their Bofors defence on what they claim are failings in the Letter Rogatory sent to Sweden. While the balance of opinion still is that the cantonal courts will overturn their appeals, the brothers might have better luck in the federal courts.

The recent Letter Rogatory on HDW, however, has come as something of a surprise because it is excellently drafted and difficult to pick holes in. (It helps also that the CBI has publicised its contents and not told lies as it did over the Bofors Letter Rogatory.)

Why the difference? Is it because the bureau has suddenly discovered a great legal brain in its midst?

No.

Our sources in the CBI say that this time the Prime Minister's Office took no chances and got expert help from outside.

The Letter Rogatory's draft was supervised by one of Switzerland's top lawyers: the flamboyant Marc Bonnant. (Pronounced 'Bonn-can', though perhaps somebody should let the CBI in on the secret.)



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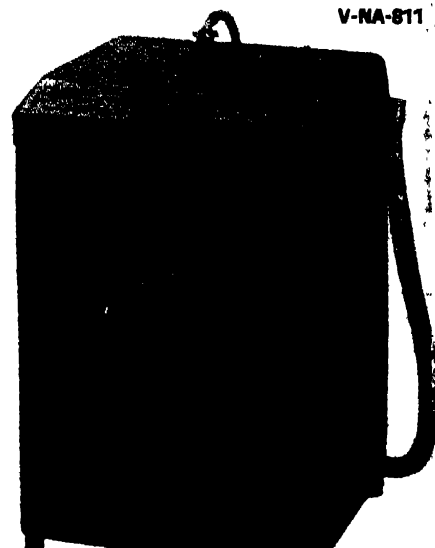
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